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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Black Cabinet
by JOHN DICKSON CARR

Three's A Shroud
by JOHN D. MacDONALD

The Ragged Pedestrian
by MICHAEL INNES

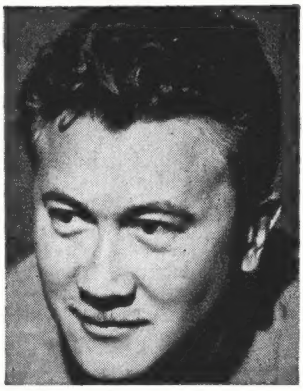
The Riviera Renegade
by LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN

The Benevolent Burglary
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

MURDER IN THE HILLS
A NEW POGGIOLI STORY by T. S. STRIBLING

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



NEXT TO THE SAINT HIMSELF, I think the character who has made the most appearances in our pages is T. S. Stribling's Professor Poggioli. We have no apologies to make for this—in fact, we hope that as time goes on more characters of this caliber will become regular members of our stable. We are starting to feel rather nicely proprietorial about this one. In MURDER IN THE HILLS, the versatile Professor disguises himself as a Bible-selling itinerant and does some detecting among the hill-billies; and we are happy to yield the Royal Box once again to this newest short novelet about one of our favorite sleuths.

Some three months ago, while tooting a trumpet over our first story by Carter Dickson, we made bold to hope that it would not be long before we could also introduce one under this writer's other (and real) name, John Dickson Carr. So to show you how we sometimes make good on our dreams, here is THE BLACK CABINET by this Mr. Carr who, we will recklessly repeat, is in our estimation the greatest puzzle writer of all time. This one is not exactly a detective story, but it is mystery and crime—and with one of the most stunning surprise endings in all fiction.

John D. MacDonald, a young writer who has been coming up fast in those magazines that carry all the advertising, is another first-timer with us this month, with THREE'S A SHROUD. We think this tough yarn of upper-echelon gangsters will show you why Mr. MacDonald is a man to watch.

Lawrence G. Blochman is another of our regulars, though he doesn't devote himself to one steady character. But this only leaves him free to exploit a greater variety; and THE RIVIERA RENEGADE, if we may put it that way, is one of the most various.

THE RAGGED PEDESTRIAN is our British contribution this month, presented by Michael Innes, one of England's brightest post-war virtuosi. You can look forward to seeing more of his Inspector Appleby in these pages.

A line-up like that should really be enough for anybody, but on account of the title of this magazine there are literal-minded people who expect to find something about the Saint in it, and who squawk if they don't. So just to placate these shmoes, we also have a thing called THE BENEVOLENT BURGLARY, which I wrote.

Leslie Charteris

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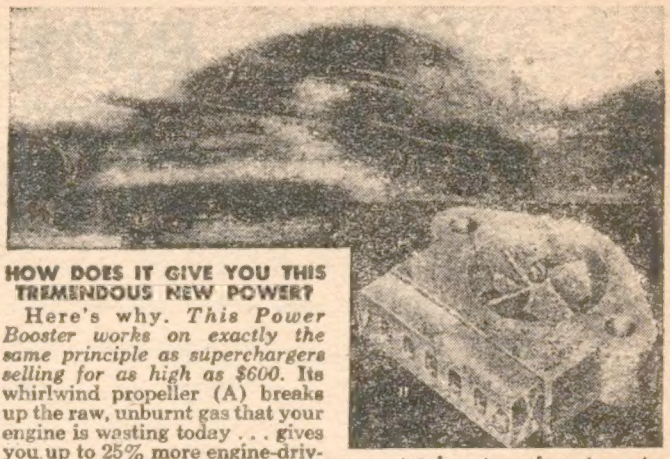

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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. LH-2, Beltone Hearing Aid Co., 400 Madison Avenue, New York 17, New York.

the benevolent burglary

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Inspector Fernack was genuinely alarmed by Templar's benevolent burglary. But the police would have gone into a tailspin without him.

SIMON TEMPLAR repeated vaguely, "Dennis Umber? I don't know . . . I think I read something about him in a newspaper some time ago, but I don't remember what it was. I can't keep track of every smalltime crook in creation. What's he been doing?"

"I just thought you might know something about him," Inspector Fernack answered evasively.

He sat on the edge of a chair and mauled his fedora with big bony fists, looking almost comically like an elephantine edition of an office boy trying to put over a new excuse for taking an afternoon off. He glowered ferociously around the sunny room in which Simon was calmly continuing to eat breakfast and racked his brain for inspiration to keep the interview going.

For the truth was that Inspector John Fernack had not called on the Saint for information about Mr. Dennis Umber. Or about anybody else in the same category. He had a highly efficient Records Office at his disposal down on Centre Street, which was maintained for the

IN A MANHATTAN MYSTERY OF CLASSIC RENOWN THE SAINT AIDS THE LAW WITH A ROGUISH INSOUCIANCE

Copyright, 1938, by Leslie Charteris
From THE HAPPY HIGHWAYMAN, published by Doubleday & Co., Inc.

sole purpose of answering questions like that. The name was simply an excuse that he had grabbed out of his head while he was on his way up in the elevator. Because there was only one law-breaker about whom Fernack needed to go to Simon Templar for information—and that was the Saint himself.

Not that even that was likely to be very profitable, either, but Fernack couldn't help it. He made the pilgrimage in the same spirit as a man who had lived under the shadow of a volcano that had been quiescent for some time might climb up to peep into the crater, with the fond hope that it might be good enough to tell him when and how it next intended to erupt. He knew he was only making a fool of himself, but that was only part of the cross he had to bear. There were times when, however hard he tried to master them, the thoughts of all the lawless mischief which that tireless buccaneer might be cooking up in secret filled his mind with such horrific nightmares that he had to do something about them or explode.

The trouble was that the only thing he could think of doing was to go and have another look at the Saint in person, as if he hoped that he would be lucky enough to arrive at the very moment when Simon had decided to write out his plans on a large board and wear them hung around his neck. The knowledge of his own futility raised Fernack's blood pressure to a point that actively endangered his health; but he could no more have kept himself away from the Saint's apartment, when one of those fits of morbid uneasiness seized him, than he could have danced in a ballet.

He stuck a cigar into his mouth and bit on it with massive violence, knowing perfectly well that the Saint knew exactly what was the matter with him, and that the Saint was probably trying politely not to laugh out loud. His smoldering eyes swivelled back to the Saint with belligerent defiance. If he caught so much as the shadow of a grin on that infernally handsome face . . . But the Saint wasn't grinning. He wasn't paying any particular attention to Fernack at all. He was reading his newspaper again, and Fernack heard him murmur: "Well, isn't that interesting?"

"Isn't what interesting?" growled the detective aggressively. "Must you speak in riddles?"

Simon folded the sheet. "I see that the public is invited to an exhibition of Mr. Elliot Vascoe's art treasures at Mr. Vascoe's house on Knickerbocker Place. Admission will be five dollars, and all the proceeds will go to charity. The exhibition will be

opened by Princess Eunice of Greece."

Fernack stiffened. He had the dizzy sense of unreality that would overwhelm a man who had been daydreaming about what he would do if his uncle suddenly died and left him a million dollars, if a man walked straight into his office and said, "Your uncle has died and left you a million dollars."

"Were you thinking of taking over any of those art treasures?" he inquired menacingly. "Because if you were—"

"I've often thought about it," said the Saint shamelessly. "I think it's a crime for Vascoe to have so many of them. He doesn't know any more about art than a cow in a field, but he's got enough dough to buy anything his advisers tell him is worth buying and it gives me something to swank about. It would be an act of virtue to take over his collection, but I suppose you wouldn't see it that way."

Fernack's brow blackened. He could hardly believe his ears, and if he had stopped to think he wouldn't have believed them. He didn't stop. "You're damn right I wouldn't!" he roared. "Now get this, Saint. You can get away with just so much of your line in this town, and no more. You're going to leave Vascoe's exhibition alone, or by God—"

"Of course I'm going to leave it alone," said the Saint mildly. "My paths are the paths of righteousness, and my ways are the ways of peace. You know me, Fernack. Vascoe will get what's coming to him in due time, but who am I to take it upon myself to dish it out?"

"You said—"

"I said that I'd often thought about taking over some of his art treasures. But is it a crime to think? If it was, there'd be more criminals than you could build jails for. Pass the marmalade. And try not to look so disappointed." The mockery in Simon's blue eyes was bright enough now for even Fernack to realize that the Saint was deliberately taking him over the jumps once again. "Anyone might think you wanted me to turn into a crook—and is that the right attitude for a policeman to have?"

Between Simon Templar and Mr. Elliot Vascoe, millionaire and self-styled art connoisseur, no love at all was lost. Simon disliked Vascoe on principle because he disliked all fat loud-mouthed parvenus who took care to obtain great publicity for their charitable works while they practiced all kinds of small meannesses on their employees.

Vascoe hated the Saint because Simon had once happened to witness a motor accident in which Vascoe was driving and a child was injured and Vascoe had

made the mistake of offering Simon five hundred dollars to forget what he had seen. That grievous error had not only failed to save Mr. Vascoe a penny of the fines and damages which he was subsequently compelled to pay, but it had earned him a punch on the nose which he need not otherwise have suffered.

Vascoe had made his money quickly, and the curse of the *nouveau riche* had fallen upon him. Himself debarred forever from the possibility of becoming a gentleman either by birth or breeding or native temperament, he had made up for it by carrying snobbery to new and rarely equalled highs. Besides works of art, he collected titles; for high-sounding names, and all the more obvious trappings of nobility, he had an almost fawning adoration.

Therefore he provided lavish entertainment for any undiscriminating notables whom he could lure into his house with the attractions of his Parisian chef and his very excellent wine cellar, and contrived to get his name bracketed with those who were more discriminating by angling for them with the bait of charity, which it was difficult for them to refuse.

In a great many ways, Mr. Elliot Vascoe was the type of man whose excessive wealth would have been a natural target for one of the Saint's raids on those undesirable citizens whom he included in the comprehensive and descriptive classification of "the ungodly." But the truth is that up till then the Saint had never been interested enough to do anything about it. There were many other undesirable citizens whose unpleasantness was no less immune from the cumbersome interference of the law, but whose villainies were on a larger scale and whose continued putrescence was a more blatant challenge to the Saint's self-appointed mission of justice.

With so much egregiously inviting material lying ready to hand, it was perhaps natural that Simon should feel himself entitled to pick and choose, should tend to be what some critics might have called a trifle finicky in his selection of the specimens of ungodliness to be bopped on the bazook. He couldn't use all of them, much as he would have liked to.

But in Simon Templar's impulsive life there was a factor of Destiny that was always taking such decisions out of his hands. Anyone with a less sublime faith in his guiding star might have called it Coincidence, but to the Saint that word was merely a chicken-hearted half-truth. Certain things were ordained; and when the signs pointed there was no turning back.

Two days after Fernack's warning, he was speeding back

to the city after an afternoon's swimming and basking in the sun at the Westchester Country Club when he saw a small coupe of rather ancient vintage standing by the roadside. The hood of the coupe was open, and a young man was very busy with the engine; he seemed to be considerably flustered, and from the quantity of oil on his face and forearms the success of his efforts seemed to bear no relation to the amount of energy he had put into them.

Near the car stood a remarkably pretty girl, and she was what really caught the Saint's eye. She seemed distressed and frightened, twisting her hands nervously together and looking as if she was on the verge of tears.

Simon had flashed past before he realized that he knew her—he had met her at a dance some weeks before. His distaste for Mr. Elliot Vascoe did not apply to Vascoe's slim auburn-haired daughter, whom Simon would have been prepared to put forward in any company as a triumphant refutation of the theories of heredity. He jammed on his brakes and backed up to the breakdown.

"Hullo, Meryl," he said. "Is there anything I can do?"

"If you can make this Chinese washing machine go," said the young man, raising his smeared face from the bowels of the engine, "you are not only a better man than I am, but I expect you can invent linotypes in your sleep."

"This is Mr. Fulton—Mr. Templar." The girl made the introduction with breathless haste. "We've been here for three-quarters of an hour."

The Saint started to get out. "I never was much of a mechanic," he murmured. "But if I can unscrew anything or screw anything up—"

"That wouldn't be any good. Bill knows everything about cars, and he's already taken it to pieces twice." The girl's voice was shaky with dawning hope. "But if you could take me home yourself . . . I've simply *got* to be back before seven! Do you think you could do it?" Her tone was so frantic that she made it sound like a matter of life and death.

Simon glanced at his watch and at the mileometer on the dashboard. It would be about fifteen miles to Knickerbocker Place, and it was less than twenty minutes to seven. "I can try," he said, and turned to Fulton. "What about you—will you come on this death-defying ride?"

Fulton shook his head. He was a few years older than the girl, and Simon liked the clean-cut good looks of him. "Don't worry about me," he said. "You try to get Meryl back. I'm going to

make this prehistoric wreck move under its own steam if I stay here all night."

Meryl Vascoe was already in the Saint's car, and Simon returned to the wheel with a grin and a shrug. For a little while he was completely occupied with finding out just how high an unlawful speed he could make through the light traffic on the Parkway. When the Saint set out to do some fast traveling it was a hair-raising performance, but Meryl Vascoe's hair was fortunately riseproof. She spent some minutes repairing various imperceptible details of her almost flawless face and then she touched his knee anxiously.

"When we get there, just put me down at the corner of Sutton Place," she said. "I'll run the rest of the way. You see, if father saw you drive up to the door he'd be sure to ask questions."

"What are you doing with that scoundrel?" Simon said melodramatically. "Don't you know that he can't be trusted with a decent woman?"

She laughed. "That isn't what I'm worried about," she said. "Though I don't suppose he'd be very enthusiastic about our being together—I haven't forgotten what a scene we had about that dance where you picked me up and took me off to Harlem for the rest of the night. But the point is that I don't want him to know I've been out driving at all."

"Why not?" asked the Saint reasonably. "The sun is shining. New York is beginning to develop its summer smell. What could you do that would be better and healthier than taking a day in the country?"

She looked at him guardedly, hesitating. "Well—then I ought to have gone out in my own car, with one of the chauffeurs. But he'd be furious if he knew I'd been out with Bill Fulton, so when I went out this afternoon I told him I was going shopping with an old school friend."

Simon groaned. "That old school friend—she does work long hours," he protested. "I should have thought you could have invented something better than that. However, I take it that papa doesn't like Bill Fulton, and you do, so you meet him on the quiet. That's sensible enough. But what's your father got against him? He looked good enough to me. Does he wash, or something?"

"You don't have to insult my father when I'm listening," she said stiffly; and then, in another moment, the emotions inside her overcame her loyalty. "I suppose it's because Bill isn't rich and hasn't got a title or anything . . . And then there's Lord Eastridge—"

Simon swerved the car dizzily under the arm of a policeman

who was trying to hold them up. "Who?" he demanded.

"The Earl of Eastridge—he's staying with us just now. He had to go and see some lawyers this afternoon but he'll be back for dinner; and if I'm not home and dressed when they ring the gong, father'll have a fit."

"Poor little rich girl," said the Saint sympathetically. "So you have to dash home to play hostess to another of your father's expensive phonies."

"Oh, no; this one's perfectly genuine. He's quite nice, really, only he's so wet. But father's been caught too often before. He got hold of this earl's passport and took it down to the British Consulate, and they said it was quite all right."

"The idea being," Simon commented shrewdly, "that papa doesn't want any comebacks after he's made you the Countess of Eastridge."

She didn't answer at once, and Simon himself was busy with the task of passing a truck on the wrong side, whizzing over a crossing while the lights changed from amber to red and making a skidding turn under the nose of a taxi at the next red light.

But there was some queer gift of humanity about him that had always had an uncanny knack of unlocking other people's conventional reserves; and besides, they had once danced together and talked much delightful nonsense while all the conventional inhabitants of Manhattan slept.

She found herself saying, "You see, all Bill's got is his radio business, and he's invented a new tube that's going to make him a fortune but I got father to lend him the twenty thousand dollars Bill needed to develop it. Father gave him the money but he made Bill sign a sort of mortgage that gave father the right to take his invention away from him if the money wasn't paid back.

"Now father says that if Bill tries to marry me he'll foreclose, and Bill wouldn't have anything left. I know how Bill's getting on, and I know if he only has a few months more he'll be able to pay father back ten times over."

"Can't you wait those few months?" asked the Saint. "If Bill's on to something as good as that—"

She shook her head. "But father says that if I don't marry Lord Eastridge as soon as he asks me to—and I know he's going to—he'll foreclose on Bill anyway, and Bill won't get a penny for all his work."

Her voice broke, and when Simon glanced at her quickly he saw the shine of tears in her eyes. "Bill doesn't know. If you tell him, I'll kill you! But he can't understand what's the matter with me. And I—I—" Her lovely face tightened with a

strange bitterness. "I always thought these things only happened in pictures," she said huskily. "How can any man *be* like that?"

"You wouldn't know, darling," said the Saint gently.

That was all he said at the time, but at the same moment he resolved that he would invest five of his dollars in an admission to Mr. Elliot Vascoe's exhibition. Certain things were indubitably Ordained . . .

He arrived just after the official opening, on the first day. The rooms in which the exhibition was being held were crowded with aspiring and perspiring socialites, lured there either in the hope of collecting one of Mr. Vascoe's bacchanalian invitations to dinner, or because they hoped to be recognized by other socialites, or because they hoped to be mistaken for connoisseurs of Art, or just because they hadn't the courage to let anyone think that they couldn't spend five dollars on charity just as easily as anyone else.

Simon Templar shouldered his way through them until he sighted Vascoe. He had done some thinking since he drove Meryl home, and it had only confirmed him in his conviction that Nemesis was due to overtake Mr. Vascoe at last. At the same time, Simon saw no reason why he shouldn't deal himself in on the party.

With Vascoe and Meryl was a tall and immaculately dressed young man with a pink face whose amiable stupidity was accentuated by a chin that began too late and a forehead that stopped too soon. Simon had no difficulty in identifying him as the Earl of Eastridge, and that was how Meryl introduced him before Vascoe turned round and recognized his unwelcome visitor.

"How did you get in here?" he brayed.

"Through the front door," said the Saint genially. "I put down my five bucks and they told me to walk right in. It's a public exhibition, I believe. Did you come in on a free pass?"

Vascoe recovered himself with difficulty but his large face remained an ugly purple. "Come to have a look round, have you?" he asked offensively. "Well, you can look as much as you like. I flatter myself this place is burglarproof."

Meryl turned white, and the earl tittered. Other guests who were within earshot hovered expectantly—some of them, one might almost have thought, hopefully. But if they were waiting for a prompt and swift outbreak of violence, or even a sharp and candid repartee, they were doomed to disappointment.

The Saint smiled with unruffled good humor. "Burglarproof, is it?" he said tolerantly.

"You really think it's burglar-proof. Well, well, *well!*" He patted Mr. Vascoe's bald head affectionately. "Now I'll tell you what I'll do, Fatty. I'll bet you twenty thousand dollars it's burgled within a week."

For a moment Vascoe seemed to be in a tangle with his own vocal cords. He could only stand and gasp like a fish. "You—you have the effrontery to come here and tell me you're going to burgle my house?" he spluttered. "You—you ruffian! I'll have you handed over to the police! I never heard of such—such—such—"

"I haven't committed any crime yet, that I know of," said the Saint patiently. "I'm simply offering you a sporting bet. Of course, if you're frightened of losing . . ."

"Such damned insolence!" howled Vascoe furiously. "I've got detectives here—" He looked wildly around for them.

"Or if twenty thousand dollars is too much for you," Simon continued imperturbably.

"I'll take your twenty thousand dollars," Vascoe retorted viciously. "If you've got that much money. I'd be glad to break you as well as see you sent to jail. And if anything happens after this, the police will know who to look for!"

"That will be quite a change for them," said the Saint. "And now, in the circumstances, I think we ought to have a stakeholder."

He scanned the circle of faces that had gathered around them and singled out a dark cadaverous-looking man who was absorbing the scene from the background with an air of disillusioned melancholy.

"I see Morgan Dean of the *Daily Mail* over there," he said. "Suppose we each give him our checks for twenty thousand dollars. He can pay them into his own bank, and write a check for forty thousand when the bet's settled. Then there won't be any difficulty about the winner collecting. What about it, Dean?"

The columnist rubbed his chin. "Sure," he drawled lugubriously. "My bank'll probably die of shock, but I'll chance it."

"Then we're all set," said the Saint, taking out his checkbook. "Unless Mr. Vascoe wants to back out . . ."

Mr. Vascoe stared venomously from face to face. It was dawning on him that he was in a corner. If he had seen the faintest encouragement anywhere to laugh off the situation, he would have grabbed at the opportunity with both hands; but he looked for the encouragement in vain. He hadn't a single real friend in the room, and he was realist enough to know it.

Already he could see heads being put together, could hear whispers . . . He knew just what

would be said if he backed down . . . and Morgan Dean would put the story on the front page . . . Vascoe drew himself up and a malignant glitter came into his small eyes. "It suits me," he said swaggeringly. "Mr. Dean will have my check this afternoon."

He stalked away, still fuming, and Morgan Dean's long sad face came closer to the Saint. "Son," he said, "I like a good story as much as anyone. And I like you. And nobody'd cheer louder than me if Vascoe took a Brody. But don't you think you've bitten off more than you can chew? I know how much Vascoe loves you, and I'd say he'd almost be glad to spend twenty grand to see you in jail. Besides, it wouldn't do you any good. You couldn't sell stuff like this."

"You could sell it without the slightest trouble," Simon contradicted him. "There are any number of collectors who aren't particular how they make their collections and who don't care if they can't show them to the public. And I've never been in jail, anyway—one ought to try everything once."

He spent the next hour going slowly around the exhibition, making careful written notes about the exhibits in his catalogue, while Vascoe watched him with his rage rising to the brink of apoplexy. He also examined all the windows and showcases, taking measurements and drawing diagrams with a darkly conspiratorial air, and only appearing to notice the existence of the two obvious detectives who followed him everywhere when he politely asked them not to breathe so heavily down his neck.

Fernack saw the headlines and nearly blew all the windows out of Centre Street. He burst into the Saint's apartment like a whirling dervish. "What's the meaning of this?" he bugled brassily, thrusting a crumpled copy of the *Daily Mail* under the Saint's nose. "Come on—what is it?"

Simon looked at the quivering sheet. " 'Film Star Says She Prefers Love,' " he read it off innocently. "Well, I suppose it means just that, Fernack. Some people are funny that way."

"I mean *this!*" blared the detective, dabbing at Morgan Dean's headline with a stubby forefinger. "I've warned you once, Templar; and, by God, if you try to win this bet I'll get you for it if it's the last thing I do!"

The Saint lighted a cigarette and leaned back. "Aren't you being just a little bit hasty?" he inquired reasonably; but his blue eyes were twinkling with imps of mockery that sent cold shivers up and down the detective's spine. "All I've done is to say that there'll be a burglary at Vas-

coe's within the week. It may be unusual, but is it criminal? If I were an insurance company—"

"You aren't an insurance company," Fernack said pungently. "But you wouldn't make a bet like that if you thought there was any risk of losing it."

"That's true. But that still doesn't make me a burglar. Maybe I was hoping to put the idea into somebody else's head. Now if you want to give your nasty suspicious mind something useful to work on, why don't you find out something about Vascoe's insurance?"

For a moment the audacity of the suggestion took Fernack's breath away. And then incredulity returned to his rescue. "Yeah—and see if I can catch him burgling his own house so he can lose twenty thousand dollars!" He hooted. "Do you know what would happen if I let my suspicious mind have its own way? I'd have you arrested for vagrancy and keep you locked up for the rest of the week!"

The Saint nodded enthusiastically. "Why don't you do that?" he suggested. "It'd give me a gorgeous alibi."

Fernack glared at him thoughtfully. The temptation to take the Saint at his word was almost overpowering. But the tantalizing twinkle in the Saint's eyes and the memory of many past encounters with the satanic guile of that debonair freebooter, filled Fernack's heated brain with a gnawing uneasiness that paralyzed him.

The Saint must have considered that contingency: if Fernack carried out his threat, he might be doing the very thing that the Saint expected and wanted him to do—he might be walking straight into a baited trap that would elevate him to new pinnacles of ridiculousness before it turned him loose. The thought made him go hot and cold all over. Which was exactly what Simon meant it to do.

"When I put you in the cooler," Fernack proclaimed loudly, "you're going to stay there for more than a week."

He stormed out of the apartment and went to interview Vascoe. "With your permission, sir," he said, "I'd like to post enough men around this house to make it impossible for a mouse to get in."

Vascoe shook his head. "I haven't asked for protection," he said coldly. "If you did that, the Saint would be forced to abandon the attempt. I should prefer him to make it. The Ingerbeck Agency is already employed to protect my collection. There are two armed guards in the house all day, and another man on duty all night. And the place is fitted with the latest burglar alarms. The only way it could be successfully robbed would be by an armed gang, and we know that

the Saint doesn't work that way. No, Inspector. Let him get in. He won't find it so easy to get out again. And then I'll be very glad to send for you."

Fernack argued, but Vascoe was obstinate. He almost succeeded in convincing the detective of the soundness of his reasoning. There would be no triumph or glory in merely preventing the Saint from getting near the house, but to catch him red-handed would be something else again. Nevertheless, Fernack would have felt happier if he could have convinced himself that the Saint was possible to catch.

"At least, you'd better let me post one of my own men outside," he said.

"You will do nothing of the sort," Vascoe said curtly. "The Saint would recognize him a mile off. The police have had plenty of opportunities to catch him before this and I don't remember your making any brilliant use of them."

Fernack left the house in an even sourer temper than he had entered it, and if he had been a private individual he would have satisfied himself that anything that happened to Vascoe or his art treasures would be richly deserved. Unfortunately his duty didn't allow him to dispose of the matter so easily. He had another stormy interview with the Assistant Commissioner, who for the first time in history was sympathetic.

"You've done everything you could, Mr. Fernack," he said. "If Vascoe refuses to give us any assistance he can't expect much."

"The trouble is that if anything goes wrong, that won't stop him squawking," Fernack said gloomily.

Of all the persons concerned, Simon Templar was probably the most untroubled. For two days he peacefully followed the trivial rounds of his normal law-abiding life; and the plain-clothes men whom Fernack had set to watch him, in spite of his instructions, grew bored with their vigil.

At about two o'clock in the morning of the third day, his telephone rang. "This is Miss Vascoe's chauffeur, sir," said the caller. "She couldn't reach a telephone herself so she asked me to speak to you. She said that she must see you."

Simon's blood ran a shade faster—he had been half expecting such a call. "When and where?" he asked crisply.

"If you can be at the second traffic light going north in Central Park in an hour's time, sir—she'll get there as soon as she has a chance to slip away."

"Tell her I'll be there," said the Saint.

He hung up the instrument and looked out of the window. On the opposite pavement a man paced wearily up and down,

as he had done for two nights before, wondering why he should have been chosen for a job that kept him out of bed to so little purpose. But on this particular night the monotony of the sleuth's existence was destined to be relieved. He followed his quarry on a brief walk which led to Fifty-second Street and into one of the many haunts which crowd a certain section of that fevered thoroughfare, where the Saint was promptly ushered to a favored table by a beaming headwaiter.

The sleuth, being an unknown and unprofitable-looking stranger, was ungraciously hustled into an obscure corner. The Saint sipped a drink and watched the late floor show for a few minutes, and then got up and sauntered back through the darkened room towards the exit. The sleuth, noting with a practiced eye that he had still left three-quarters of his drink and a fresh package of cigarettes on the table, and that he had neither asked for nor paid a check, made the obvious deduction and waited without anxiety for his return. After a quarter of an hour he began to have faint doubts of his wisdom, after half an hour he began to sweat, and in forty-five minutes he was in a panic.

The lavatory attendant didn't remember noticing the Saint, and certainly he wasn't in sight when the detective arrived; the doorman was quite certain that he had gone out nearly an hour ago because he had left him two dollars to pay the waiter.

An angry and somewhat uncomfortable sleuth went back to the Saint's address and waited for some time in agony before the object of his attention came home. As soon as he was relieved at eight o'clock he telephoned headquarters to report the tragedy; but by then it was too late.

Inspector Fernack's eyes swept scorchingly over the company that had collected in Vascoe's drawing room. It consisted of Elliot Vascoe himself, Meryl, the Earl of Eastridge, an assortment of servants and the night guard from Ingerbeck's.

"I might have known what to expect," he complained savagely. "You wouldn't help me to prevent anything like this happening but after it's happened you expect me to clean up the mess. It'd serve you right if I told you to let your precious Ingerbeck do the cleaning up. If the Saint was here now—" He broke off, with his jaw dropping and his eyes rounding into reddened buttons of half-unbelieving wrath.

The Saint was there. He was drifting through the door like a pirate entering a captured city, with an impotently protesting butler fluttering behind him like a flustered vulture—sauntering coolly in with a cigarette between

his lips and blithe brows slanted banteringly over humorous blue eyes. He nodded to Meryl and smiled over the rest of the congregation.

"Hullo, souls," he murmured. "I heard I'd won my bet, so I toddled over to make sure."

For a moment Vascoe himself was gripped in the general petrification, and then he stepped forward, his face crimson with fury. "There you are," he burst out incoherently. "You come here—you—" There's your man, Inspector. Arrest him!"

Fernack's mouth clamped up again. "You don't have to tell me," he said grimly.

"And just why," Simon inquired lazily, as the detective moved towards him, "am I supposed to be arrested?"

"Why?" screamed the millionaire. "You—you stand there and ask *why?* I'll tell you why! Because you've been too clever for once, Mr. Smarty. You said you were going to burgle this house, and you've done it—and now you're going to prison where you belong!"

The Saint leaned back against an armchair, ignoring the handcuffs that Fernack was dragging from his pocket. "Those are harsh words, Comrade," he remarked reproachfully. "Very harsh. In fact, I'm not sure that they wouldn't be actionable. I must ask my lawyer. But would anybody mind telling me what makes you so sure that I did this job?"

"I'll tell you why," Fernack spoke. "Last night the guard got tired of working so hard and dozed off for a while." He shot a smoking glance at the wretched private detective who was trying to obliterate himself behind the larger members of the crowd. "When he woke up again, somebody had opened that window, cut the alarms, opened that center showcase and taken about a hundred thousand dollars' worth of small stuff out of it. And that somebody couldn't resist leaving his signature."

He jerked out a piece of Vascoe's own notepaper, on which had been drawn a spidery skeleton figure with an elliptical halo poised at a rakish angle over its round blank head. "You wouldn't recognize it, would you?" Fernack jeered sarcastically.

Even so, his voice was louder than it need have been. For, in spite of everything at the back of his mind there was a horrible little doubt. The Saint had tricked him so many times, had led him up the garden path so often and then left him freezing in the snow, that he couldn't make himself believe that anything was certain. And that horrible doubt made his head swim as he saw the Saint's critical eyes rest on the drawing.

"Oh, yes," said the Saint patiently. "I can see what it's meant

to be. And now I suppose you'd like me to give an account of my movements last night."

"If you're thinking of putting over another of your patent alibis," Fernack said incandescently, "let me tell you before you start that I've already heard how you slipped the man I had watching you—just about the time that this job was done."

Simon nodded. "You see," he said, "I had a phone message that Miss Vascoe wanted to see me very urgently and I was to meet her at the second traffic light going north in Central Park."

The girl gasped as everyone suddenly looked at her. "But Simon— I didn't—" Her hand flew to her mouth.

Fernack's eyes lighted with triumph as they swung back to the Saint. "That's fine," he said exultantly. "And Miss Vascoe doesn't know anything about it. So who else is going to testify that you spent your time waiting there—the man in the moon?"

"No," said the Saint. "Because I didn't go there."

Fernack's eyes narrowed with the fog that was starting to creep into his brain. "Well, what—"

"I was expecting some sort of call like that," said the Saint. "I knew somebody was going to knock off this exhibition—after the bet I'd made with Vascoe, the chance of getting away with it and having me to take the rap was too good to miss. I meant it to look good—that's why I made the bet. But of course our friend had to be sure I wouldn't have an alibi, and he was pretty cunning about it. He guessed that you'd be having me shadowed, but he knew that a message like he sent me would make me shake my shadow. And then I'd have a fine time trying to prove that I spent an hour or so standing under a traffic light in Central Park at that hour of the night. Only I'm pretty cunning myself, when I think about it, so I didn't go. I came here instead."

Fernack's mouth opened again. "You—"

"What are we wasting *time* for?" snorted Vascoe. "He admits he was here—"

"I was here," said the Saint coolly. "You know how the back of the house goes practically down to the East River, and you have a little private garden there and a landing stage? I knew that if anything was happening, it'd happen on that side—it'd be too risky to do anything on the street frontage, where anybody might come by and see it.

"Well, things were happening. There was a man out there, but I beat him over the head and tied him up before he could make a noise. Then I waited around and somebody opened the window from *inside* and threw out a parcel. So I picked

it up and took it home. Here it is."

He took it out of his hip pocket—it was a very large parcel, and the bulge would have been easy to notice if anyone had got behind him.

Vascoe let out a hoarse yell, jumped at it and wrenched it out of his hands. He ripped it open with clawing fingers. "My miniatures!" he sobbed. "My medallions—my cameos! My—"

"Here, wait a minute!" Fernack thrust himself forward again, taking possession of the package. For a second or two the denouement had blown him sky-high, turned him upside down and left him with the feeling that the pit of his stomach had suddenly gone away on an unauthorized vacation; but now he had his bearings again. He faced the Saint with homicidal determination.

"It's a fine story," he said raspily. "But this is one time you're not going to get away with it. Yeah, I get the idea. You pull the job so you can win your bet and then you bring the stuff back with that fairy tale and think everything's going to be all right. Well, you're not going to get away with it! What happened to the guy you say you knocked out and tied up, and who else saw him, and who else saw all these things happen?"

The Saint smiled. "I left him locked up in the garage," he said. "He's probably still there. As for who else saw him, Martin Ingerbeck was with me."

"Who?"

"Ingerbeck himself. The detective bloke. You see, I happened to help him with a job once so I didn't see why I shouldn't help him with another. So as soon as I guessed what was going to happen, I called him up and he met me at once and came along with me. He even recognized the bloke who opened the window, too."

"And who was that?" Fernack demanded derisively, but somehow his derision sounded hollow.

The Saint bowed. "I'm afraid," he said, "it was the Earl of Eastridge."

His lordship stared at him pallidly. "I think you must be mad," he said.

"It's preposterous!" spluttered Vascoe. "I happen to have made every inquiry about Lord Eastridge. There isn't the slightest doubt that he's—"

"Of course he is," said the Saint calmly. "But he wasn't always. It's a curious old English custom—a fellow can go around with one name for most of his life and then he inherits a title and changes his name without any legal formalities. It's funny that you should have been asking me about him, Fernack. His name used to be Dennis Umber. As soon as Meryl mentioned the

Earl of Eastridge I remembered what it was that I'd read about him in the papers. I'd noticed that he came into an earldom when his uncle died. That's why I thought something like this might happen, and that's why I made that bet with Vascoe which has proved so disturbing."

The night guard fizzed suddenly out of his retirement. "That's right!" he exploded excitedly. "I'll bet it was him. I wondered why I went off to sleep like that. Well, about two o'clock *he* came downstairs—said he was looking for something to read because he couldn't get to sleep—and got me to have a drink with him. It was just after he went upstairs again that I fell off. That drink must've been doped!"

Eastridge looked from side to side and his face twitched. He made a sudden grab at his pocket, but Fernack was too quick for him.

Simon Templar hitched himself off the armchair as the brief scuffle subsided. "Well, that seems to be that," he observed languidly. "You'll have to wait for another chance, Fernack. Go home and take some lessons in detecting, and you may do better next time." He looked at Vascoe. "I'll see my lawyers later and find out what sort of a suit we can cook up on account of all the rude things you've been saying, but meantime I'll collect my check from Morgan Dean."

Then he turned to Meryl. "I'm going to lend Bill Fulton the profits to pay off his debts with," he said. "I shall expect a small interest in his invention and a large slice of wedding cake."

Before she could say anything he was gone. Thanks didn't interest him: he wanted breakfast.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT *will be*

LESLIE CHARTERIS, *with* "The Patient Playboy"

H. C. McNEILE, *with* "Bulldog Drummond Steps In"

ARTHUR SOMERS ROCHE, *with* "Club of One-Eyed Men"

RAOUL WHITFIELD, *with* "Murder Is My Business"

MIGNON G. EBERHART, *with* "Case of the Calico Cat"

THEODORE STURGEON, *with* "Half-Way Tree Murder"

the seven shapes of solomon bean

by . . . Edward W. Ludwig

"A change of mood," wrote a famed wit, "sharply multiplies a man's personality." But Bean's many faces were of one mind about murder.

THE CHILDREN cried, "Hippety-hop, hippety-hop! Hippety-hop to the barber shop!"

They pointed, some giggling timorously and some laughing brazenly, to Solomon Bean's roly-poly stomach, his spindly tight-trousered legs, and his wide eyes that protruded from a white, balloon-like face.

But for Solomon Bean the children did not exist. The early morning sunshine, the suburban street with its quiet umbrellas of October-brown branches, the rows of cheaply-constructed houses—all were as indistinct to him as the lazy shifting of far-away cloud-mist.

Solomon Bean was separated from the world by a prison of fear. He was an automaton borne on wings of fear. His mind floated numb and helpless in a sea of fear. At each second, his pounding heart sent a fresh surge of fear through his veins.

He continued his bouncing gait until he reached a small, single-storey, rough-boarded house. A coherent thought rose

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It isn't often that a writer new to mystery fiction comes up with a story as splendidly written as this, or a story so gratifyingly just right *in its skillful employment of suspense, symbolic realism and dialogue-developed characterization to achieve a forcefulness almost Hemingwayesque. Edward Ludwig has been both a Coastguardsman and a schoolteacher and he has been writing fiction sporadically since 1948. But with this, his first venture into the detective-mystery field, he displays a mastery a big-name professional might well envy.*

out of the fear-numbed surface of his mind.

"Home at last," he mumbled. "Thank you, God."

He hurried onto the rickety porch, tucked his lunch-pail under his arm, fumbled for his key. Shaky fingers on key. Shaking key in lock. A twisting and a turning. The door swung open on squeaking hinges.

Inside, Solomon Bean closed the door behind him—quickly, as if to shut out an invisible pursuer. He wiped perspiration from his face and brushed back gray, bushy hair.

"Home," he breathed. "Now I'm not alone."

His fear faded. He turned to the great mirror on the wall of the entrance hall. His gaze met that of Mr. Slim Bean.

Solomon thought, "Careful now. You mustn't show *them* that you're afraid. Be confident, fearless. That way they'll help you more."

Mr. Slim Bean leered out from his long frame. He was some eight feet in height and about six inches in width. Like Solomon, he was dressed in faded dungarees and a worn denim shirt. His lean face held a gray stubble of beard, and his hair was like an abandoned rats' nest. Slim Bean resembled an immense wax doll that had melted over a hot stove, the face and body stretched mercilessly and grotesquely to almost twice their normal length.

"Morning, Slim," said Solomon.

The reflection in the mirror did not answer.

"Goodness, you've got fly specks on you again," said Solomon. "Tsk, tsk." He produced a red bandana, spat on a corner and rubbed Slim Bean's mirror-surface. "There. That's better."

Slim smiled his appreciation.

Solomon's face became serious. "Slim, I've bad news. *Marko is out.*"

He hesitated as if to let the terrifying words sink deep into Slim's consciousness.

"Yep. He's out, Slim. Escaped from State Prison just last night. Heard it on the radio at the factory."

Slim was silent.

"The factory," Solomon repeated. "You know. Where I work. Where I'm night watchman."

Slim nodded.

"And he'll be coming to get me. I *feel* it. He'll kill me just like he killed young Bob Morris ten years ago. You remember Bob, don't you?"

Slim nodded again.

"A good boy, Bob. Always friendly and kind. Always happy. But *you* know all that. You were with him, too—for five years, I reckon."

Both Solomon and Slim rubbed their stubbled chins.

"Maybe I never told you just what happened. Bob and this Marko, partners they was at the boardwalk. Had their Hall of Mirrors. You know how the Hall was—you was there long enough."

Solomon's voice trailed. His mind traveled back to a decade ago, back to the boardwalk with its rows of multi-colored lights, back to the Casino with its dazzling games of chance, back to warm summer nights and stars that hovered over waters of cerulean calm like eyes of icy fire.

Solomon could still hear echoes of the rattling roller coaster, of the lilting beat of carousel music, of the deep-boweled murmur of the timeless, of the happy laughter of the man-swarm that flowed up and down the boardwalk.

And he could almost see himself in the ticket booth of the Hall of Mirrors, flanked on one side by the Fire Eaters of Zamboanga, on the other by the Human Pincushion.

He'd been at the very core of life then. There was no loneliness and no growing old on a boardwalk. The flow of time itself was staunched by the brilliant colors and joyous sounds, and one remained young forever.

How different that life was from his life of today. Today! Rising just before midnight, spending the dark morning hours in the silent, hollow factory, returning home just when the rest of the world was awakening. Why, except for people like Slim, he might pass a whole month without speaking to another human being!

Solomon became aware that Slim's drooping eyes were even sadder than usual.

"Let's see, where was I? Oh yes. They roomed here, young Bob and Marko. Right in that front bedroom we never use. How Bob stood it, with Marko drunk half the time, I don't know. But Bob was easy to get along with—until that night."

He shivered. "No, I see you don't like to hear about it. I don't like to talk about it either. There was an argument in their room about some girl. I heard 'em talking. Bob kept telling Marko he shouldn't have done what he did. Then they had this fight. Marko killed Bob. Killed him with a switchblade knife buried right in his throat."

A shudder coursed through Solomon's body. "Reckon Marko would've got away with it 'cept for me. He tells the cops he wasn't here, says a burglar must have done it. But I was here. I heard 'em and saw Marko leaving with blood on his hands and the devil in his eyes.

"And that's what I told the cops and the jury. And that's why Marko went to prison for ninety-nine years."

Somewhere in the house a

clock was ticking, counting off the slow, hot seconds.

"We got to be ready for him, Slim. You're here in the hall, watching the front door. You got to help me, Slim—you and the others. You know how Marko used to curse at you and how good Bob was to you. And you know how good I am to you. I keep the flies off you and everything, don't I? You'll help me, won't you, Slim?"

Slim nodded most emphatically.

"Then this is your station. If you see him coming, call me. Watch hard, Slim—and *keep watching.*"

Solomon Bean shuffled wearily into his small kitchen. There, filling the immense six-foot-wide frame above the table was Mr. Fatty Bean.

Mr. Fatty Bean, in contrast to Mr. Slim Bean, was some five feet wide and only three feet tall. It was as if his monstrous body had been squeezed in a vise, compressed to form a ludicrous, yet somehow jovial-appearing midget.

"Morning, Fatty," said Solomon.

Fatty's stomach rippled a bit, like a hesitant sea tide, but he said nothing.

"Dear, your cord is getting frayed again," murmured Solomon. "You must be gaining weight. Remind me to fix you soon. If you ever fell off that wall and hit the table you'd break into a thousand pieces."

Then Solomon's face hardened. He told Fatty Bean of Marko's escape. Fatty's face retained its supercilious grin. He was like a squashed cherub whose tremendous belly quivered with suppressed hilarity.

"Damn you, it isn't funny!" Solomon exclaimed. "You think maybe I'm silly, that he isn't coming to kill me? Well, he *is*. You weren't at the trial, but *I* was. When the jury found him guilty, Marko looked at me like he wanted to cut out my heart with a razor blade. He didn't have to say nothing. It was like I could read his mind. I knew then he'd try to kill me if he ever got the chance—just like I know now he's on his way to get me."

Solomon released a snort of disgust. "Don't know why I'm telling you all this. You couldn't help me even if you wanted to. You're too fat to move around. Everything to you is just a joke. All you do is eat, eat, eat. All right, damn you, you just wait there for your supper. So help me you'll wait a hell of a long time!"

Solomon blinked in sudden amazement. Fatty's expression of hilarity remained, but now it seemed like the grinning red mouth painted on the mouth of a sad clown. Behind the mask, about the eyes and brows, was

genuine sorrow. A pair of tears rolled out of the gargoyle eyes.

Solomon lowered his head, ashamed.

"I—I'm sorry, Fatty. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. It's just that I'm worried. You know you've always been my favorite. That's why you're here, above the table. I like to see happy faces when I'm eating. Why, I wouldn't lose you for anything."

More tears streamed down Fatty Bean's monstrous cheeks.

"And you're my oldest friend. Remember how Marko went to prison and some of the mirrors from the Hall were stored in my garage? And how I found 'em and you were on top and I brought you inside first? Remember all that?"

The tears stopped. Fatty's face again rolled with silent mirth.

"That's better. You just stay right there. Keep out of the way. We'll take care of Mr. Marko. And we'll eat pretty soon, don't you worry."

He paused for a few seconds. Then, half to himself, he muttered, "There's one good thing anyway. Tonight's my night off at the factory. I won't have to leave the house for two days. I won't be alone for a single second."

Tickety-tock, tickety-tock, said the tireless clock in the living room.

It seemed to Solomon as if the venerable timepiece were destroying time rather than measuring it, as if it enjoyed a perverse delight in flinging the precious seconds into the dark abyss of the past.

How soon would Marko come? An hour? Two hours? A day?

State Prison was some two hundred miles away. In a fast car Marko could travel the distance in less than four hours. And he'd escaped nearly six hours ago.

Solomon Bean shuddered. He hurried out of the kitchen onto the small back porch. He fastened the clasp that locked the screen door. Then he turned to Mr. Two-Heads Bean.

Mr. Two-Heads Bean hung between a laundry basket and an unpainted cupboard littered with empty milk bottles, boxes of miscellaneous nails and paint cans.

The body of Two-Heads was almost like Solomon's, with the customary supply of appendages. But extending from his slim shoulders like adjacent sculptures of trembling jelly were two necks and two heads. If one knelt before him on hands and knees, the two heads would melt into one. Then again, if one stood on tiptoes or upon a chair, Two-Heads would sprout a second chest.

But usually Two-Heads was simply a personage with two heads. His frame, Solomon recalled, had been one of the rarest

and costliest in the entire Hall of Mirrors.

"Morning," said Solomon hesitantly.

He was always a bit apprehensive when in the presence of Two-Heads Bean. There was something about his stern features that smacked of latent fury and smouldering violence. Two-Heads somehow reminded Solomon of mythical monsters like snake-haired Medusa and three-eyed Cyclops.

Nevertheless, Solomon told him of Marko's escape. The creature's two foreheads became wrinkled with hateful scowls. Tiny spears of fire flashed in his four eyes.

"Atta boy. I knew I could depend on you."

Two-Heads nodded eagerly.

"*You* won't be afraid. No sir."

Two-Heads shook his head furiously.

"Now let's see. I'll put you in the kitchen in the corner by the icebox. That way you can look out both the north and east windows at once. You can watch in two directions at once."

He stood on a chair and slipped the heavy cord of the frame off its hook.

"You know, Two-Heads," he mused, "we used to think sometimes we were kind of lonesome, didn't we? Golly, we didn't know how lucky we were. Nobody bothered us and we could do anything we darn pleased. Reckon a lot of people in the world would give anything to be like that, eh? If we get through this, we'll never want another thing as long as we live, will we?"

Solomon placed Two-Heads in his position by the windows, his frame leaning on the icebox.

Very softly, he whispered, "I —ah—wouldn't say anything to Fatty if I was you. Poor fellow, I hurt his feelings enough already, and he won't like you being in the kitchen, too. But we can't take chances. We *know* he'll be no good when Marko comes."

Tickety-tock, tickety-tock.

Where was Marko now? Speeding in a swift auto? Striding along some country road? Or was he, now, at this very instant, sliding noiselessly onto the front porch, his murderer's eyes peering into the windows?

Wherever he was, he was coming closer, closer.

Solomon stood in the living room before the biggest frame of all. It was square, about six by six, and the outer surfaces of its glass were curiously curved.

"Hey, there! Where are you?"

Within the frame there was only a misty nothingness.

Solomon moved forward. "Tom! Dick! Harry!"

No response.

He took another step forward.

"Ah, *there* you are!"

Peering out at him were three

small elfin creatures, one to his left, one directly before him, the third to his right.

They were like rubber-doll replicas of Solomon himself. They were endowed with the agility of jumping-jacks and the restlessness of wild birds.

"Listen, fellows. I got to tell you—"

Zip!

The triplets swept out of sight as if yanked upward by tightly-stretched rubber bands.

"Come back!" Solomon cried. "This is important!"

He shuffled slightly backward. The triplets reappeared at the top of their frame. They were upside down.

"Come down here. Get yourself right-side up!"

Solomon bent forward.

Swish!

The triplets vanished again. Solomon stepped back. The triplets burst into view in the center of their frame. They stared intently at Solomon.

"That's more like it."

Solomon told them the ominous news.

"And you know what'll become of *you* if he kills me. He'll smash you to smithereens just out of orneriness or else you'll be put out in the garage again, back with the dust and cockroaches."

Alarm flooded the features of the triplets.

"So I'll make you my Minute Men. You're the fastest of anybody here. You can get places faster than you can say Solomon Bean. You stay here in the living room, in the center of the house. If anybody yells, you come and come quick."

The triplets, like Solomon, nodded.

"And don't be disappearing just when we need you. For once you've got to stop flittering around like—like fairies in the moonlight. And keep your right sides up. Understand? Of course you do, don't you?"

Of course, replied Tom, Dick and Harry, inaudibly.

Solomon thought for a few seconds.

"Slim at the front door. Two-Heads at the rear, in the kitchen. The triplets standing by, a reserve force. Fatty's protected behind the table. And me. We're ready—all seven of us."

Yet a doubt, an uncertainty was gnawing in the depths of his mind, struggling to break into his consciousness.

"There's something else," he mused. "Something I've forgotten."

The window shades—should they be drawn? If drawn, Marko couldn't look in, but neither could Slim and Two-Heads look out.

He snapped his fingers.

Weapons!

That was it. Weapons.

Hmmm. There were knives in

the kitchen drawers. But knives reminded him of a night when a young man named Bob Morris lay with his life gushing out of his torn throat in rich, dark streams. No, knives could do terrible things.

Solomon darted to the wood box by the kitchen stove. "Sure. I should have thought of this!"

He filled a bent arm with big sticks, ran through the house distributing them.

"A long thin one for you, Slim!"

"A big one, a real club, for you, Two-Heads!"

"Three little ones for you, Tom, Dick and Harry!"

"And you, Fatty—" He hesitated. Fatty Bean look at him apologetically and shamefully. "I'll give a club to you if you really want one. But I think you better just stay out of the way."

Tears formed in Fatty's eyes again.

"And now," murmured Solomon, "we wait."

They waited.

At nine in the morning Solomon and Fatty nibbled on an unappetizing breakfast of bread and milk.

At ten o'clock Solomon sank onto his bed, still clothed. "Got to rest," he thought. "Got to be ready for tonight. Marko's the kind who'd come at night."

He lay twisting and turning for a long time in a kind of fear-ridden half-sleep. It seemed as if he hadn't really slept at all. Yet, at length, he heard the living room clock strike once, twice —seven times in all.

"Seven times," he mumbled. "Seven o'clock."

Seven o'clock! Evening!

He sat bolt upright. Outside his bedroom window the trees and shrubbery were cloaked in soft autumn twilight. The shadows were darkening and expanding, like hungry tongues devouring the thin carcasses of lingering sunlight.

The gnawing doubt, the impression that he'd forgotten something returned to Solomon's mind.

Tickety-tock, tickety-tock.

Except for the ceaseless counting of seconds, the house was quiet. It was almost as if he were alone.

Alone—

Realization flooded into his consciousness like a chilling sea wave. He *was* alone!

He'd forgotten that Slim and Fatty and Two-Heads and the triplets existed only for him, that to other people they were but grotesque distortions in mirrors.

How *could* he have forgotten that?

When he'd first hung the mirrors in the house, looking at them had been only an amusing pastime. Then he'd named them and begun to talk to them. Somehow they'd developed living personalities. They'd become more real

to him than the shadow-like faces he passed each day on the streets. But now—

Alone.

Tickety-tock, tickety-tock.

Suddenly the voice of the clock changed. It said: *Coming-to-kill-you, coming-to-kill-you.*

He must get help.

There was a telephone at the neighbors' house, at the Nakamuras'.

Solomon leaped off the bed, stumbled to the front door. He jerked to a stop. "Not the front door. *He* might be watching. The back door."

He ran through the kitchen without even glancing at Fatty Bean. Carefully, he loosened the clasp on the screen door. He peeked outside.

The dark world beyond was like the fantastic terrain in a child's nightmare. Its shadows were bottomless pit-homes of demons; its cool air was the evil breath of lurking monsters.

His heart thudding, Solomon tiptoed out. The last remaining islands of half-light seemed to fade even as he gazed at them.

He groped his way along the side of the house, and climbed awkwardly over the low picket fence at the edge of his yard. Hunched, his head turning nervously from side to side, he moved across the Nakamuras' back yard.

Above him, there was a rustling and a stirring of leaves. A night-bird flashed out of an oak tree.

"Police," he mumbled. "I've got to call the police."

There were no lights in the windows of the Nakamura home. The yard was in darkness, and there were no lights in any of the nearby houses. Even the stars had been erased by a high overcast. The world was in darkness. Humanity had deserted him. He was alone.

But the Nakamuras *must* be home, he told himself. Perhaps they were in bed already.

He stumbled across the yard. He tripped on a hose, fell, and scrambled erect. He reached the back door, and knocked once loudly. Within the house there was silence.

He knocked again, furiously. An auto horn sounded, far away. Somewhere a dog howled.

The night closed in, black and thick. It pressed against Solomon's chest. It entered his throat and nostrils like odorless smoke, choking him. He was like a blind man standing in the depths of an icy sea.

"Mr. Nakamura!" he called, his legs shaking.

No answer.

. . *"Mr. Nakamura!"* he screamed, his voice cracking.

A twig snapped. Soft footsteps fell on dry leaves. Somewhere, not far away, someone was walking, slowly, slowly, in the darkness.

Solomon became a fragile leaf borne on a typhoon-lashed sea of terror. Sobbing, he ran across the yard, crashed into the picket fence. A ripping, a tearing, a frantic escape from the finger-like pickets. A bounding up porch steps. A slamming of a screen door.

Then the light from his kitchen burst into his vision. He could breathe again.

Before him, in the kitchen, was the foreboding figure of Two-Heads Bean. Solomon straightened and swallowed his sobs, trying to conceal the terror that had overwhelmed him. The realization that had come to him a few minutes ago was gone now, and was as irretrievable as wind-blown froth from a dandelion.

"I tried to call the police," he explained, puffing. "It was a stupid thing to do. They wouldn't believe that Marko's coming to kill me anyway. They don't know how Marko looked at me that day in court. They wouldn't understand how I *know* he's coming. I—I don't know what got into me. Don't know why I got so scared."

Both Solomon and Two-Heads pursed their lips. "We don't need the police anyway, do we? There's seven of us—six if we don't count Fatty. We ought to be able to handle him, eh?"

Two-Heads nodded.

"Okay, keep watching. I'll see if the others have anything to report."

He passed through the kitchen.

"Everything all right?" he asked Fatty.

Fatty's stomach rippled in a wave of silent laughter.

Solomon entered the living room.

"All ready, fellows?"

Tom, Dick and Harry Bean flickered into brief existence—right side up.

"That's the stuff."

He reached the entrance hall.

"Hello," said Marko.

Marko was a big, long-limbed man. His light brown hair, combed straight back, was thinning so that you could see the whiteness of his scalp. His flesh held a middle-aged flabbiness, but his broad-jawed, thin-browed face held echoes of a youth in which, possibly, he'd been handsome.

"Hello," he said again, his hands in the pockets of his black-leather jacket. "Surprised to see me?"

Solomon stared helplessly.

Slim, his mind cried. *Why didn't you call? Why didn't you stop him?*

"You forgot to lock the door, Sol. That's mighty careless," Marko said with a wry chuckle.

Solomon felt dizzy. How *could* he have forgotten to lock the door?

Why didn't you remind me, Slim? And you, Tom, Dick and

Harry, and Two-Heads! You should have—

"How you been, Sol? I see you got one of our old mirrors. That the best you can do to cover up the cracks in the walls?" Marko's calm blue eyes and bland expression seemed a mask hiding the real flow of thought and emotion within him.

"I—I'm doin' fine," Solomon stuttered. "How about you?"

"I've been doing a lot of thinking. I been thinking how if it hadn't been for you I'd never have gone to prison. No, except for you, I'd have led me a good life."

Solomon clenched his fists. "But you killed Bob. I just told what I saw. You can't hold that against me."

"Can't I?"

Marko's eyes were suddenly flecked with fire. "You mean I should love the guy who fouled up my life?"

The big man withdrew a black object from the pocket of his jacket. He pressed a stud. A shining, four-inch knife-blade sprang outward.

Slim, Solomon's brain screamed, *where are you, Slim? Stop him, Slim!*

The fire in Marko's eyes faded. He began to trim his fingernails. "Handy little gadget," he said softly. "Always liked a good switchblade knife."

Sweat trickled down Solomon's chalk-white face. Terror was strong in him again, but it was a terror of immediate reality, not of imagined possibilities. He kept the terror from mushrooming into blind hysteria.

"You wouldn't hurt me, Marko," he breathed. "You couldn't get away with it."

Marko spat. "I haven't a damned thing to lose, Sol. I hated you that day in court. For ten years I've kept hating you. My guts are so full of hate for you I can taste it."

He raised the knife. Its shining needle-tip was on a level with Solomon's chest. "And the only way to get the hate out of me is for me to see you dead."

Marko lunged forward.

A wild, raw animal wail ripped from Solomon's throat. He jumped aside. "Slim!" he yelled. "Help me!"

Slim did not appear. It was as if the world held but two inhabitants—Marko and Solomon.

Marko cursed and moved forward.

Solomon whirled. Wide-eyed, he stumbled into the living room. His roly-poly body richocheted off the edge of the doorway.

"Tom, Dick, Harry!"

He stopped before the big frame.

Empty.

"Tom! Dick! Har—"

Marko's feet thudded into the living room. Solomon heard the savage rasp of the big man's breathing. He caught a kaleido-

scopic side glance of the hard face, the slitted eyes, the gleaming knife-point—all swimming behind a veil of tears and terror.

The knife swooped down out of the mist, ripping into shirt and flesh. A spear of flame streaked down Solomon's right arm. The knife arched upward, poised itself to strike again.

Two-Heads will help me. Two-Heads won't be afraid.

Solomon's pipe-stem legs skittered through the living room. A chair overturned. The pain in his bleeding arm spread through his body like surging rivers of flame.

"Two-Heads!" he screamed. "Two-Heads! Help me!"

Two-Heads did not appear.

"Two-Heads! Hurry!"

He bounded through a doorway. His racing feet slipped on a piece of stove wood, sent him hurtling against the kitchen table. His outstretched palms slid over the table top. A vinegar bottle and a salt shaker overturned, rolled, and fell with a crash to the floor. For a brief instant he saw Fatty's monstrous face leering at him from the wall above the table.

Solomon pushed himself backward and twisted his trembling, pain-filled body. He was facing Marko's onrush now, his feet on the floor, his back bent over the table's edge.

The big man collided with Solomon, too surprised by the sudden stop to bring the knife into striking position. Breath whoosed out of Solomon's lungs as the impact carried him backward.

The feeble legs of the table snapped. The table fell. Solomon tumbled to the floor, landing on his hands and knees as Marko stood swaying, struggling to recapture his balance. His big body collided with Fatty's frame.

There was a sudden, splintering crash . . .

Solomon rose slowly, puffing and blinking and gaping incredulously. He took a slow step forward—and stopped.

He stared in awed silence at the fallen frame with its parted cord which lay on Marko's rising and falling chest. He gazed at the unconscious figure of Marko himself, bloody-faced and sprawled in a sharp pool of broken glass.

"Fatty Bean," he murmured at last. "You stopped him. By golly, Fatty Bean—of all people!"

There was a knocking on the screen door of the back porch. After a time Solomon went to the screen and saw Mr. Nakamura.

Mr. Nakamura said, "I was coming up my driveway and thought I heard yelling."

So Solomon showed the groaning form of Marko to Mr. Nakamura, and then in a very short while the police came.

"He was going to kill me, and

the frame fell on him," Solomon told them simply.

He did not explain about Fatty and Slim and Two-Heads and the triplets because he felt that they, like himself, would not wish their private worlds exposed to the uncomprehending eyes of strangers.

The police seemed satisfied and they took Marko away in handcuffs and said he would never, never bother Solomon again. And two men in white uniforms cleaned and dressed Solomon's wound. And then silence—delightful, miraculous silence—returned to the house. It spread a kind of funeral solemnity over the scene as Solomon swept up the broken, shining corpse of Fatty Bean.

Finally, he stood in the kitchen, smiling at the figure in the big tall frame. "No, I'm not mad at you, Slim. Gosh, I'm not surprised you and the others were too scared to help me. I was so scared myself at first I couldn't even call for help. But you're my favorite now. Yep, you're going to be here in the kitchen. You'll be my dinner companion instead of Fatty—maybe we can put a little meat on those skinny bones. And Two-Heads can have your old place in the entrance hall."

Slim smiled happily.

"But we'll never forget Fatty, will we?"

Slim shook his head. His long face became grim.

"Poor Fatty. We hurt his feelings and told him he was only in the way. Yet he gave his life to save us. Fatty, with his little legs and big stomach and all that fat—"

Both Solomon and Slim wiped tears from their eyes.

"Yep, Fatty was the bravest—the very bravest of us all."

The Saint's back next month in a brand new adventure—"The Patient Playboy"—set in Bermuda and it's the story of the mystery of "Jolly Roger" Ivolot, who cut a wide swath through London's caje society. Said he was from Bermuda—but when they looked for him there, no Bermudian had ever heard of him. Yet he was there all the time. And—let's leave it to Simon.

three's a shroud

by . . . John D. MacDonald

It's dangerous to win in a card game—when Death is waiting to trump the deck with a hidden spade.

CHOWDER gave me the assignment one hot afternoon in Chicago. I like to stay in shape and that morning I had gone three fast sets of tennis with a pro at the club. It was one of those afternoons. Chowder was at the big desk he keeps in the front room of his apartment and I was in sweatshirt and shorts over on the divan. Chowder was going over the coded reports from the outlying districts. Syndicate business.

Gloria was sitting cross-legged on the floor beside me, hunched over a magazine. I had my right hand on the nape of her neck, running my fingers up through her bronze hair. Gloria is a good kid, but not too bright.

Her drink was on the floor beside me, and her cigarette smoke was curling up through the still air. She has never gotten it through her head that I don't smoke or drink just because I don't like the tastes involved.

I've told her that a gentleman is a guy with none of the minor

It is perhaps not too surprising that there should be no less than three John MacDonalds in the mystery field with divergent middle initials. It is a fairly frequent, Scottish clan kind of name that rings stoutly on Highland ears, and we're sure that all mystery lovers know which MacDonald is which by this time. But what is amazing is the fascinative brilliance of all three MacDonalds, coupled with an overlapping popularity which gives no sign of abating. And here's a John D. MacDonald mystery worthy of the clan that's sure to please.

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vices, but she merely gives me a blank look.

Chowder got his name because he started in a political way in some small New England town trying to buy the voters with free chowder and beer at picnics. He has a flat white face, no hair, and a little mouth like an upside down U. He is a very rough man indeed.

"Go down to the bar and buy yourself a drink, Gloria," he said.

She gave him a look of quick annoyance. "I like it here."

I took my hand away from the back of her neck, put my palm flat against her ear and pushed. She sprawled over and jumped up, hopping mad.

Before she could start yapping, I said, "Do like the man says, honey."

She walked to the door with an insolent strut that showed off certain clothing concessions she had made to the Chicago summer weather. The door banged behind her.

"Sit up when I talk to you, Wally," Chowder said.

I swung around to a sitting position, yawned and smiled at him. He rapped a report with the back of his fat white hand. "Now you go to work," he said.

"Who gets roughed up?" I asked.

He stood up, frowning. "Wally, we got an investment in you. You know that."

I didn't know it. For a little AWOL, hijacking and black market stuff in Paris, they had given me ten in Leavenworth. The reviewing authority had set me loose after thirty-seven months. With the DD's that made jobs rough, guys like me were good recruits for the syndicate, particularly those of us who had had more than a taste of combat.

I had been with the syndicate for a little over a year at a hundred bucks a week, and had drawn a total of four assignments, each one involving roughing up a few chiselers who felt that the syndicate was taking too big a cut of the local sucker money, and had appropriated some of it for themselves.

I had given the syndicate their money's worth.

But it was wise to let him talk.

"This is a different sort of deal, Wally," he said. "This one is for keeps."

I frowned. "Then send out a couple of your stooges who are too dumb to care, Chowder," I said. "I don't like ropes and chairs and gas chambers."

He ignored me. "This is the Boss's orders, kid. Here's the deal. Up until six months ago we were dragging five thousand a week out of the city of Bruerton in upstate New York. Our local man is Sid Marion. You met him at the meeting. That

five came from machines, books and treasury tickets.

"Then the take dropped to about two a week. The Boss called Sid in and found out that a couple of years ago they put the cops in that town on a merit basis. Six months ago the chief, who could be had, died. The present joker, a youngish guy named James Fosting, moved in. He can't be had. Right behind him in line is one of the old boys we can get to."

Chowder narrowed his eyes. "Since the loss is a hundred fifty thousand a year, the Boss asked Sid to go to work on the new chief. Smear him. Or get to him. No dice. This guy Fosting has closed down three-fifths of the gambling in Bruerton. It's a town of a hundred and forty thousand. The Boss has confidence in you, Wally. It's your baby."

"Why not send a gun up there to knock him off the easy way?"

"Because then the citizens get upset and maybe some bright boys figure the angles and the Deputy Chief, who can be had, doesn't move into Fosting's slot. This has to be a smoothie. Accidental, if possible."

I yawned and made it look like a real yawn. "Chowder, you tell the Boss that Wally Gerrit is making a hundred bucks a week and for that he doesn't do the job."

"He's authorized a little bonus if you make out okay."

"Exactly how much?" I asked.

"Five thousand!"

I thought it over. It had a nice solid sound. But not solid enough. "Five plus ten percent of the net for the first year after he's out," I said.

Chowder got confidential. "Wally, I'm your friend. You know I can't go ahead with a proposition like that."

At the bedroom door, I turned and said, "While I'm dressing, maybe you ought to contact the Boss and get an okay—or get somebody else."

II

I showered, shaved, put on a white mesh shirt, the new rayon cord suit, knotting the pale blue bow tie just the way I like it. I looked over the finished product in the full-length bedroom mirror. When I was eighteen, a dolly told me that I reminded her of a big sleepy blond cat. She told me my eyes had a cold look.

I always think of her when I look in the mirror.

When I came back out, Chowder said, "He'll go along at seven and a half percent."

I walked to the door. "Okay. It's a deal."

"Where are you going?" he asked.

I grinned at him. "First, I'm going downstairs and get my girl out of the bar. Then I'm coming back here and draw a

thousand bucks advance. Then she's going to pack my stuff, and I'm leaving for Bruerton. Okay with you?"

Gloria was at a corner table, and a slicker type had moved in on her. Gloria likes games. When she saw me coming, she unwrapped her fingers from the glass and planted her palm across the slicker's lips. He was one startled guy.

He looked up at me and Gloria pouted and said, "Honey, this man has been annoying me. You came just in time."

I just looked at him. He knew his cards had come off the bottom of the deck. For three seconds he thought it over. Then he got up and slid away fast. I realized I was getting weary of Gloria's little tricks.

"Why didn't you hit him?" she demanded.

"Come on," I said. "Time to pack."

The eager light came into her eyes. Gloria likes far places. She likes to be on the move.

But she was disappointed. I checked her packing job on my stuff, folded the crisp bills Chowder gave me out of the safe, went in to where Gloria was packing her own bags and said, "Snap it up, Baby."

She smiled up at me. I had tipped Chowder and the doorman off too. She was to wait in front for me while I got the car. I stacked her bags on the sidewalk and carried mine around to the car.

I grinned to myself as I waited for a light six blocks away, thinking of the expression on Gloria's face when she finally realized I wasn't picking her up, and tried to get back in. The doorman would have himself a handful scaring her off. In a week she'd cool off and be back at her job as dice girl in one of the bars.

It's kid stuff to barrel along in a car like a big shot. I kept the needle right on fifty.

The bad thing about driving is that it gives you too much time to think. I had hoped to inch my way up in the syndicate without ever having the pressure on too hard. This was a horse of a new color. It gave me the trembles.

It had been a long time since I had killed a man. The last one was in a Paris alley two weeks before I was picked up in the big raid. And that hadn't been a pretty one. We couldn't risk a shot, and I had to whip him to death with the gun barrel. He had been softening up and we were afraid he was going to chum up to the M.P.'s.

But that had been sort of a spur-of-the-moment deal. I remembered how sick to my stomach I had been after it was over. This was worse. This was cold-blooded. I had a pretty clear idea that it had been Chowder who had recommended me for the job, hoping that I would foul

up. I knew that Chowder was afraid of me.

The difference was in the background, I guess. When Chowder was a kid, he had been brought up in comfortable, middle-class surroundings. While his mother was tucking him in bed, I had been sneaking out over the orphanage wall with Mick and Chuncky, heading through the dark streets down to the waterfront, ganging up on the drunks we hauled into the alleys.

When I was fifteen, I drove for two crazy guys who were knocking over gas stations. They chiseled me on my cut and I quit them the week before they stepped into a trap. It hadn't been pretty. Their new driver caught one over the ear and sheared off a gas pump and they went up in flame and black smoke.

Rufe Ventano was the guy who smartened me up. During the three years I worked for him, making book, he taught me how to dress and act. He taught me the right line of chatter and the proper fork to use. He died in bed of pneumonia a week before I was inducted.

After the mortar fragment creased my thigh in the Bulge, I was hospitalized near Paris, released to a replacement pool and assigned to an M.P. detail in Paris. After a month of watching the clumsy crooks making big dough, I moved in. During the seven months I was AWOL, I made a hundred thousand dollars. I had it in big notes, United States, and when they closed in, I stashed it behind a rock in the subcellar we used as a headquarters.

As I drove toward Breurton, I realized that if I could carry off the job they had given me, I could ask for a month off. The dough I would get, if properly placed, would get me legitimately to France. I wanted to reach behind that rock.

With the hundred thousand, I could buy myself a little talent among the syndicate personnel, enough to move Chowder out of my way and take over his job.

So it all depended on how I worked it out with James Fosting, Chief of Police of Bruerton.

I left the car in a storage garage and took a cab to the hotel. I signed in as Thomas Quinn, giving a Chicago address.

My room with bath in the Stanley Hotel in Bruerton was so small that you couldn't open the room door and the bureau drawer at the same time. The bed was narrow and hard. But it was a respectable hotel. That was important.

With the room door locked, I sat on the bed and went over, for the twentieth time, a few of the tentative plans I had made on the road. The day was fairly cool for September. So, after a shower, I changed to a tweed coat and gabardine slacks.

I got some of my shopping done that first day. I bought a used portable typewriter, a ream of paper and a brief case. Then I had the room clerk get on the ball and get a suitable table for my room.

The other little item was more important. I had to be careful about it. After breakfast the second day, I walked around, heading toward the shabbiest part of the business district, until at last I found a print shop that looked next door to bankruptcy.

A bell jangled when I went in, and an old guy in a green eyeshade came out, peering nervously through the gloom.

Even though I explained carefully that it was a joke I was playing on a friend, he didn't want to cooperate until I let him see the corner of the twenty-dollar bill. I waited while he ran off the letterhead I wanted. It looked okay, and I paid him the twenty for five copies on his best quality bond paper.

The letterhead was that of one of the top-flight publishing houses.

Back in the room, I wrote a rough draft of the letter, and then carefully typed it. I addressed it to my fake name, Mr. Thomas Quinn, at the address I had given on the register card when I checked in.

Dear Tom:

Bill and I are really enthusiastic about the job you've done this time. There certainly is a need right now for this sort of book.

We would like to go ahead with it as it stands, but Bill says it could be longer than the present 60,000 words.

We talked it over and have decided that, along with the other men, you should include about twenty thousand words on a man named James Fosting who has been doing an outstanding job of cleaning up Bruerton, New York. He is Chief of Police there.

Make it the same sort of intimate biography technique that you used on the others. Find out how he thinks, what he eats, where he goes for amusement—all that in addition to the main job of finding out the reason for his success.

You can use this letter with him, if it will help. By the way, how would you feel about changing the title to "Men Who Make Our Cities"? Sound okay to you?

A check for your advance will go out sometime next week.

Sincerely,

AL JUSTIN

In composing the letter, I was aided by the three years of education I received while locked up. If I made Fosting suspicious in any way, he would check back with the publishing house. I had to carry off the act, and do it well.

My next job was to go to the public library, read some of the articles in municipal journals and make a list of a few men who were written up with loud praise. I was careful to select them from cities with which I was reasonably familiar.

From a drugstore phone booth, I called the number Chowder had given me for Sid Marion. When he came on the line I said, "Sid just listen and don't ask questions. I've come here to help out. You know who sent me. You met me at the annual meeting. Don't blink an eye if you see me in funny company. I'll call on you, if and when I need help."

I hung up before he could answer. I had the feeling that the further I stayed from Sid Marion, the better I could operate. If he had been on his toes, he would have thrown some syndicate dough around in the Common Council to spike the police merit system before it ever got under way.

I expected that he would be surrounded with the usual group of amateur and semi-pro sharpies, ward heelers, and buck-hungry hangers-on.

For guaranteeing him freedom from competition and a war chest to tide him over the rough times, and legal talent to keep him out of pokey—the syndicate stepped in to take half his net. A syndicate spy had, of course, been sent in to make certain that Sid wasn't holding out on the syndicate.

The way the force was set up, the Deputy Chief had his office at Police Headquarters, and the Chief had an office over in City Hall, adjoining the office of the Commissioner of Public Safety.

III

I went in, sat on the bench in the outer office and spent some happy moments admiring the talent he had at the secretarial desk before I got the call to enter the sanctum.

James Fosting turned out to be a tall guy with a long, leathery-looking face. He was about thirty-five, I guessed. He wore the local equivalent of a Brooks Brothers suit, and under the high forehead, the blue eyes had a harsh and knowing gleam.

I gave him my best variety smile and handed him the letter. I didn't sit down until he asked me to. There are cops who claim that they can tell a wrong in one third of a second. Those cops have holes in their heads. No hick cop has ever made me on first look. You have to have presence. And a nice, open, honest smile.

I sat and watched him read the letter. His eyes flicked down it, then he started in again from the beginning and read it more slowly.

"Hmmmm," he said. "Very

flattering, Mr. Quinn. I'm honored."

"Can I assume that it's okay with you, Chief?"

"With strings. One—I took over a very bad situation here, Mr. Quinn. Very bad. Straightening it out is still a fourteen-hour-a-day job. I can't slight that job. You'll have to get a lot of your information second-hand. Two—I want to read every word you write and approve the final draft. One wrong sentence, and my political enemies might use it as an excuse to move me out of here."

I knew he was normal, and I knew he had swallowed the hook. I didn't even have to give the line a yank to set the hook. Already he was thinking of himself in that book. City builder. Ha!

He had been crisp and businesslike, but now he had that old pleased gleam in his eye. He pushed a button on his desk.

The lush item came in briskly. "Miss Calder, this is Mr. Quinn." I stood up, and we nodded at each other.

"Mr. Quinn is including a writeup of me in a book that has been accepted by a good publishing house. What shape is your work in?"

"I'm nearly caught up."

"Good. I'm assigning you to Mr. Quinn. Have Miss Willington take over your desk. Explain the ropes to her. You are at liberty to give Mr. Quinn any information he may request. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

I was still standing. Chief Fosting stood up too. He stuck his hand out, and I took it. "When she's given you all she knows, come to me to get the blanks filled in."

I sat patiently on the bench again while Miss Calder finished a few letters and got hold of a chubby item named Willington and gave her the routine. Willington acted nervous, but pleased.

She sat on the other side of the booth.

I think of women in terms of music. I don't know why. Gloria was barrelhouse piano with a boogie base.

There have been women who were bright, raw trumpet, or the gusty blast of a trombone. One or two have been a tom-tom beat. But this Janet Calder was something else. Violins. The long-hair brand of music. But neither cool nor faint nor dull.

She was nineteen or twenty. Blonde. A wide, sensitive mouth, with a flare to her nostrils and wide eyes of a blue-violet shade. Keen eyes. They didn't look as if they'd miss a great deal.

Her young body was almost excessively feminine, but she didn't throw it around. She carried herself in a way that showed she could swim, play tennis, ride.

Her hands and arms were tanned. Her eyebrows made her hair look dyed, which it wasn't. They were thick black eyebrows, unplucked. They made me want to lean across the table between us and run the tip of my finger along them. They looked as though they would feel like fur.

Fosting knew what he was doing when he attached me to her for information. I scribbled in my prop notebook while she filled in the background very carefully for me.

It was an unusual background, Law degree. FBI before the war. G-2 during the war. He had come back to his home town in late '45 just as the merit system went in. And he had become a rookie cop. With his talents, he passed the competitive examinations with a rating and performance record that got him up to sergeant in the middle of 1946, lieutenant by the spring of 1947, captain by Christmas of 1947. Oddly, the other men on the force didn't resist his extremely rapid rise. When the chief died, his grading was tops, and he moved into the hot spot.

I asked a few questions, scribbled down the answers.

"How come you know him so well, Janet?" I asked.

I saw the faint blush. She spun her coke glass in a wet pool on the black marble tabletop, making a pattern of interlocking rings. She watched those rings as though they were very important.

"My dad was a policeman for years," she said. "I was in business school when dad was shot and killed on New Year's Eve in nineteen forty-five. Chief Fosting, then a rookie, took an interest in me and saw that there was enough money for me to finish the course. Then he helped me get a job."

"Nice guy," I said casually.

"It's stronger than that!" she snapped. "He's—he's a wonderful man. I respect him and admire him more than any man I've ever met. He's fair and honest and—"

I grinned at her. "How long have you been in love with him?"

For a minute I was afraid I had gone too far. Her face got white and her lips were firmly compressed. She had been calling me Tom, as per agreement, but she said, "Mr. Quinn, I hardly think that your job gives you any right to—"

"Hey, wait a minute, Janet!" I said. "I was just kidding. Take it easy. He's a nice-looking guy and I thought you two had some arrangement or other."

Her anger faded. She looked rueful. "You know, he doesn't even know I'm alive. As a woman, I mean. I'm just an efficient piece of office equipment. Sorry I flared up. I guess—well, I guess I am in love with him."

There was no reason under the

sun why her words should irritate me. But they did. It was certainly none of my business who she was in love with.

To cover up, I asked quickly, "Where does he live?"

"In a little room in the Stanley Hotel. It's a horribly bare little room. He doesn't seem to care about his environment. He's so wrapped up in his work."

That gave me a jolt. Fosting right in the same hotel with me. It might be a break.

"Any wine, women and song?" I asked. "I mean—is he wise enough to relax?"

She shook her head. "I sometimes wish he'd—well, get out sometimes. He looks so tired. But he says that there's too much for him to do."

"You live with who?" I asked.

She tilted her head to one side. "What has that got to do with your writeup, Tom?"

"I just wondered who you'd have to call to tell them I was taking you to dinner."

"Are you?"

"You heard the Boss's orders, Janet."

Her smile was a little-girl grin. It wrinkled her nose and made me want to kiss her. "Okay," she said. "Boss's orders. If you must know, I live all by myself in a boarding house for young business ladies on Maple Terrace. And now you can take me back there so I can change."

I compromised by putting her in a cab and promising to call for her in an hour.

IV

I found myself singing in my shower, and wondered why. I picked the answer up an hour later.

Funny how it happens to you. You think you have the world cased, have yourself all set from here on in. And then somebody throws a blonde monkeywrench into the machinery. I decided that I was silly to keep the car out of circulation. So I took it out of the garage, put the top down and called for Janet.

The old dragon who ran the place kept me waiting in a stuffy little room which had crocheted antimacassars on the back and arms of the gray-brown chairs.

Janet came down looking like one of the girls they should put on magazine covers and don't because they can't find them often enough.

"Yours?" she asked when I opened the car door for her. When I told her it was, she said, "Writing must be pretty profitable. Maybe I'm in the wrong racket."

The steak house she steered us to was fair, and, over the coffee, in order to make the thing look good, I hauled out the notebook again.

I asked her to describe each of his movements on an average

day. The guy was a bear for punishment. To the office by seven-thirty on foot. Half an hour for lunch. Usually not through until nine. I casually worked in the idea that, since he had clamped down so hard on gambling, he must fear personal reprisals and go around with a bodyguard.

She laughed at that one. "Heavens, no! Jim—I mean Chief Fosting has put the fear of God into all the sneaking little men in this town. He'd consider it beneath his dignity to go around with a guard."

I smiled. "Maybe I hadn't ought to put that in the article. It might encourage somebody to potshot him."

"I think he'd like them to try. He carries his own revolver and he's an expert shot with it."

That was an important fact to file away. Not that I was going to gun him down. I had better plans. I folded the notebook, and slipped it into my side pocket.

"Working day over?" she asked.

"No. Not by a long shot. Now you've got to give me some of the local color. I can't write a good chapter on Fosting until I know what the city is like. Where do we go from here?"

"I'm going to demand overtime!"

"Am I that bad?" I asked her.

"You'll do, Quinn," she said softly.

Some dregs of long-forgotten conscience stirred me. Maybe some of it showed on my face.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

I smiled. "Where do we go?"

"There's one place I've always wanted to go," she said, "and I've never had an excuse before. But this could come under the heading of local color. I want to go to the Scatcat Club."

"Sounds delightful," I said. "What is it?"

She had a pixie look in her eyes. "A gambling den!" she whispered.

"Hey, I thought your boss closed those all up!"

"He did. All of the ones inside the city. This one is over the line."

From the way the place was running, I knew that the fix was on, but good. Thus the peephole setup to get to the upstairs games was just so much thrill for the suckers, plus insurance against somebody knocking the place off with profit in mind.

It was a penny-ante outfit, with the dapper male cashier dispensing chips at the one, five, ten and fifty level. There weren't many fifties in play. I tried to stake Janet, but she shook her head, took a twenty out of her purse and bought twenty one-dollar chips. I did the same.

They were getting a college crowd at the place, plus the old lady business, plus the beer sales-

man set. There was a bar in the corner.

Roulette, birdcage and the crap tables were getting a decent play. Janet stared around like a school kid in the principal's office. The sign near the birdcage said that they would take a maximum fifty-dollar bet with a limit of six doubles. Thus the most that could be placed on a number on one turn of the cage was sixteen hundred. Not good and not bad. The limit on doubles made the house percentage high enough to keep it honest.

I don't know why I felt so proud to be with Janet Calder. She made all the other women up there look like harpies. She was like a fresh breeze blowing through the stale smoke.

She settled for the dice. When I saw that the dice games were no limit, I knew that the house had a fix on them. With the education Chowder gave me, it didn't take long to figure it out. They were set up to handle a routine switch of the dice, and they were playing on an oilcloth surface. That spelled trippers. It is the simplest dice fix.

The dice can be square and true and properly weighted, but on the side opposite the one they don't want to come up, they have some sticky stuff, not noticeable to the touch. The dice will always roll, tumble and slide to a stop. They don't slide on that sticky stuff. It will trip the dice over.

We found a place at the table wide enough for the two of us, and the pressure of her shoulder against my upper arm was very sweet indeed.

A florid yokel across the way was betting heavy, the sweat standing on his upper lip.

I told Janet to follow my lead and I started betting the other way, with the dice. The switch was pulled so smoothly that I didn't see it. Sure enough, the red-faced citizen aces once, deuce-aces the second time, then tosses a six followed by a seven, while both Janet and I let our bets ride to a happy little total which we drag.

Janet's face was flushed with excitement. She didn't understand what was going on, but she liked winning. I knew that if I was running the game, I'd feed her dice that built up a few naturals, so when they came to her, I told her to try five. I was beginning to get onto the switch. Seven came out and I told her to let it ride. Seven again, the same way, and there was twenty in front of her.

Suckers along the table piled on, hoping she was having a run, and I made a quick estimate, decided the stick man would let her get one more natural. Eleven came out and he paid off nearly all the way around. A lot of them were letting it ride, so I reached out and hauled in all but one chip for her.

"Why'nt ya let the li'l lady play her own game, doc?" the stick man said.

I didn't bother to answer him. He'd already pulled the switch. The dice came a four, and then a seven. I passed them along. We'd each picked up fifteen bucks on the florid man's bad luck, and thirty-four more on Janet's passes. Total of ninety-eight.

It looked like the sort of bust-out house that would hate to have you walk out with even that much. I didn't want a fuss, so I decided to drop my share and get out. A floor man had his eye on us and I guessed that the stick man had tipped him that I might be a little too wise for their good.

I wanted to drop the few bucks at the same table, but then Janet saw a poker game getting under way over in an alcove.

"There's my game," she said. "Come on!"

I didn't like it. At first I was going to sit it out, but then I began to wonder just how far they'd go.

There were eight of us. The house dealt and took a cut of each pot. I took a long look at the other six players. They really had that game stacked. Two of them were house men, though trying not to look that way. The dealer had a mechanic's grip on the deck.

It was five-card stud. No ante, of course. Five-buck bet, and after that it was pot limit. No limit on raises.

To warm the game up, the cards were dealt honestly the first few hands. The house boys were getting the feel of the six suckers. I folded my hand the first few rounds, and watched Janet handle her cards. She seemed to know what she was doing. When she had a ten of hearts in the hold, a nine of hearts up, she stayed once, and folded when her third card turned out to be the trey of spades.

Then the house began to go to work. A skinny citizen across the way, who kept biting his lip, got an ace up. He peeked at his hole card and bet five. A house man bumped him, and when it came around, Skinny advertised his aces back to back by bumping again.

It cost Skinny a hundred bucks to look at his last card. The house man came through, of course, with three sevens, whereas Skinny didn't improve on his original pair of aces.

The next few hands were dull, and then I felt the kill coming. After the opening bet, Janet and me and the two house men were left. I had eights backed. She was on my left with a queen showing. The house man was on my right with a jack showing. The other house man had a ten showing.

I guessed that everybody had them back to back. Janet, with queens back to back was looking

down everybody's throat. And, with my eights, I had to follow. The man with the jack showing bumped, and Janet bumped back, catching me in the middle.

The next card, the third card, didn't help anybody but me. It gave me three eights. To make it look good, I bet fifty. Everybody stayed. The fourth card didn't help me a bit, but it gave Janet three queens, gave the guy on my right his third jack and the other house man his third ten.

At that point the two house men started bumping each other, with both Janet and me caught in the squeeze. Janet took the last of her money out of her purse, and I slipped her two hundred over her protest, telling her that she could pay it back out of the pot—if she won.

There was well over a thousand bucks in the pot by the time the flurry stopped. Janet's hands were shaking. I was cold inside, figuring an angle.

It all depended on the first card dealt. That went to the house man with the three tens. If he collected the fourth, we were licked. He got a four. The next card came to Janet. An ace. No improvement.

My timing had to be just right. I waited until the card was free of the pack, the card that I suspected would give me the fourth eight. As soon was it was free, I slapped my cards over and said, "Folding!"

I kept my eye on that card that was free of the pack. I wanted to laugh at the expression on the face of the dealer. It was a stupid thing for me to do, as I could have called Sid in the morning and gotten my losses back. But I had to show off for Janet.

The dealer couldn't stick the card back in the pack. It was frozen in the air for a moment and he said, "You can't fold while the cards are coming."

Without taking my eye off the card he held, I said, "I can fold any time, brother."

He had to give it to the other house man. My fourth eight. And the unused card on the top of the deck, I felt certain, was the fourth jack that the house man didn't get.

Janet took another hundred, pushed it out into the pot and whispered to me, "Stupid! You threw in the winning hand!"

The house men didn't call. Janet pulled in the big pot. The dealer gave me a long look.

We walked slowly to the desk and converted the chips into cash. The usual bouncer stepped up to me and said, "Sir, there's a call for you on the phone in the office."

"Wait down in the lounge," I told Janet, and followed the guy.

He opened the door, stepped in right after me and leaned against it. An ex-cabby type sat

behind the desk, picking his teeth with a split match.

They gave me the silent treatment. I smiled amiably.

"Wise guys we don't go for around here," he said, favoring me with a black scowl.

I thought there was more to come, so I was off guard. The bouncer's fist, cased in brass, caught me on the mastoid bone, and the edge of the desk hit me across the bridge of the nose as I went down.

Through a swirling mist, I heard the man behind the desk say, "Clean him, Al, and roll him down the back stairs."

Al rolled me over onto my face. He started to fumble at my pockets. His necktie hung free. I got it in my hand and yanked down hard, as I brought my knee up. The middle of his face made a sound like a ripe apple being run over.

As he fell across me, I reached through the kneehole of the desk, got one of the ex-cabby's ankles in my hand and dragged him under there with me. He didn't seem eager to join me. But he stopped objecting when I got him by the throat and banged his head against the leg of the desk a few times.

When they began to stir, I was seated at the desk talking to Sid. Al held a large handkerchief to the middle of his face. I smiled at them.

I finished my conversation and hung up. I put my fingertips together, my elbows on the desk. "You two shouldn't have any trouble finding a job," I said. "—in some other town. Mr. Marion has just advised me that he's replacing you, as of tomorrow night. You can pick up your pay from him. The new man will clean out these thumb-handed mechanics you've got in there and put in some artists. This place could net twice as much, if you let the public win once in a while."

As I came around the desk, they started to make their apologies. I pushed my way out, glad that the brass hadn't broken the skin, and wondering how soon I'd have to cover my black eyes with dark glasses and pretend I'd strained them, or something.

Janet stood up, as I appeared in the doorway of the downstairs lounge. In her eyes was mirrored the surprise that I had seen in the eyes of the boys on the upstairs door.

"What on earth did—?"

"Not here, baby," I said. I took her arm, and we went out the side door to the floodlighted parking lot.

She didn't speak until we were a half-mile away, and picking up speed. Then she said, "You've got to explain, Tom."

I found a quiet spot near a country crossroad, and pulled over. I cut the lights and motor, and held a match for her ciga-

rette. She moved around in the seat so she could face me.

"What happened back there?"

"Why do you ask?"

"A horrible little man came up to me in the lounge and said that you'd fallen and hurt yourself and that in a little while you'd be out in the car. I told him I'd wait right where I was. He shrugged and went away. I was getting scared. I didn't know what to think of that phone call." She paused. "I've been doing a lot of thinking, Tom."

There was enough pale moonlight so I could see the lovely planes of her face, the delicate hollows at her temples.

"I did fall, but I wasn't as badly hurt as they thought, Janet," I said, quietly.

"What happened at that dice table?" she asked. "What happened in the card game? Why did they act so funny? It was as though they knew something, and so did you, and they didn't like your knowing it."

I was right about those smart eyes of hers. She saw things, and her mind meshed very nicely. By trying to be Mr. Smooth, I had put myself neatly out on a limb.

There seemed to be a very good answer. I put my hands on her shoulders, pulled her toward me, slipped my arms around her. She ducked her lips away from me. But I caught her and kissed her. She went limp and dead, her lips firmly compressed. It's as good a defense as any.

I kissed her unmoving lips until I began to feel silly. Then I felt her stir in my arms, felt her arms creep up and circle my neck. And suddenly she was the most alive creature in the world. It lasted while the car seemed to spin like a crazy top, and then she tore herself away and planted a stinging slap, high on my face.

"Damn you!" she whispered. "Damn you!"

She moved over into the corner of the seat near the door and said in a small voice, "Take me home, please."

No words were spoken on the trip back to her place. I let her out and walked up onto the porch with her. She had been fumbling in her bag. In the darkness, after she had unlocked the door, she turned and thrust a wad of bills at me. As I bent to pick up the ones that fluttered to the porch, the front door shut firmly.

I shrugged, stuffed the money in my side pocket, parked the car in an all-night lot near the hotel, and went up to my room.

While I was in the shower, the phone rang. I went to it, lifted it off the cradle, and said, cautiously, "Yes?"

Her voice. "Tom?"

"Yes?"

"Good night, darling." She hung up.

Once again I found myself

humming in the shower. I went to sleep, thinking of her.

V

She must have changed her mind again. During the three days that followed, she gave me, in cool and precise tones, the answers to my questions. She refused to go out with me. I began to run out of questions. I had become an expert on James Fosting. I knew his shirt size, brand of toothpaste, and next dental appointment.

On the fourth day, she broke down.

We were awkward with each other during dinner, with more things being said with our eyes than with our empty words.

Then we got in the car and, as I drove out of town, she leaned her head against the back of the seat. Her blonde hair was tossed by the wind. We didn't talk.

I found a secluded spot, and she came into my arms with a little sob that started deep in her throat. When I kissed her, I felt the tears on her cheeks. It wasn't the sort of kiss I was used to. It was sort of a dedication. There's no better word.

In my arms, she looked up at me and said, "Who are you and what do you want?"

I held her tight and smiled down at her. "I'm the guy who is writing a book. Remember me?"

She looked up at me, her eyes grave in the moonlight, and shook her head from side to side. "No, Tom. You're not writing a book. Your publishers have never heard of you. No man named Al Justin has ever worked for them."

I sat very still, and something inside of me turned to ice. I had guessed the reactions of Fosting, but I hadn't taken into account the emotional reflexes of a woman.

Before I could answer, she said, "I don't want anything to hurt him, Tom."

"Who wants to hurt him?" I said.

"I think you do. You were at home in that gambling place, Tom. You were at home with those people. I—I don't know what to think. There's something fine and clean and decent about Jim Fosting. And there's something about you as black as the grave."

It jolted me. I tried to laugh it off. "You make me sound like a fiend!"

"Maybe you are, Tom," she said softly.

"Then why are you here?" I asked her, tightening my arms to show her what I meant.

Her voice was broken. "I don't know, Tom. I don't know. I don't trust you and I don't love you and yet I can't help . . ."

I tilted her chin up and kissed her again. She was eager in my

arms, and a dull roaring obscured my hearing. I was conscious only of her, and then, as from a great distance I could hear her saying, half moan, half sob, "No—no—no—no . . ."

I fought my way back to sanity and opened the car door. I stood out in the night, breathing in the cool air in great gulps. When I turned and smiled at her, her face was pale but composed.

"Thank you," she said in a little girl voice.

I knew it was time to go back. There was work to do. I left her at her door, kissed her lightly on the lips, and walked back out to the waiting car.

Chowder had bribed his way into my room. He was sitting on the bed, waiting for me. One of the punks he collects was standing by the bureau, cleaning his nails with my file.

After I shut the door, Chowder said, "The Boss thought you were taking too long, Wally. He wants it for tomorrow."

"Okay, he gets it for tomorrow. Bright and early," I said.

Chowder liked the plan I outlined. The best plans are the simple ones. This was simpler than most. Three blocks from the hotel was a small freight depot. Big trucks. Fosting left the hotel at seven sharp every morning. To get to the City Hall, he walked down a street with a narrow sidewalk, walled with red brick buildings.

At a quarter to seven there was only one man in the freight depot, a driver who came to hook his tractor to a trailer full of groceries.

The plan was to get into the freight yard, sap the driver, hoist him into the cab, and time it to move up over the sidewalk and crush Fosting against the bricks. The man handling it, which would be me, could then pull the unconscious driver over under the wheel, slip out and make like he was a witness.

The driver's lack of memory would be taken to be the result of concussion. Shock-amnesia. Routine acident. Too bad.

Chowder questioned me in detail. The punk filed his nails as he listened. I explained how the man with the sap could hide just inside the freight yard gate and lay it gently over the driver's ear as he came in. He'd never be seen.

All the time I was telling Chowder, I was thinking of Janet. She was a clean kid, a good kid. Fosting, in spite of the age difference, would be right for her.

But there wouldn't be any more Fosting. And if there was the slightest slip, she knew enough to point the finger right at me. And that wasn't good.

Chowder had a bottle and he kept nipping at it. He told me his room was right down the hall. I couldn't stop thinking of

Janet, of the smell of her hair and the taste of her lips.

"What's the matter with you?" Chowder asked. "You nervous?"

I was pacing around. I stopped and grinned at him. "Should I be?"

"I don't know. You look edgy to me, pal. I hope you can handle this picnic okay. The Boss wouldn't want any slips."

"But you wouldn't mind, would you?"

"What the hell does that mean?"

"You'd like to see me nailed for it, wouldn't you, Chowder?"

He sulked, "Ah, shove it, Wally."

He sat on the bed and I could see that he was getting an idea. It was slow coming to him, and he had to nibble on it for some time. Then, when he had it set, he looked up at me without expression.

"You're too nervous for the job, Wally," he said.

I got it right away. "That's right. Things weren't going good. You came down here. Poor old Wally had a good plan lined up, but no guts. So you took over. Yep, Wally is all right for dreaming up things, but no follow-through. That means Wally wouldn't ever fit into a responsible position like yours. Very cute. The point is, Chowder, how do you make it stick?"

Like a sucker, I had let his punk ease around behind me. I caught the signal that Chowder gave him. I ducked, and the sap nearly tore my ear off. I spun and he gave it to me, backhand across my mouth. I felt the teeth give as I dropped toward the floor. I never felt myself hit the floor.

When I came out of it, I was on the bed. Chowder was in the chair. His jaw sagged open and he was snoring. My ankles were tied together and my wrists were tied to the two bedposts at the head of the bed. Some kind character had stuffed a pair of my soiled socks in my mouth and tied them in place with a handkerchief. One end of a sock stuck out just far enough so I could see the pattern when I looked down my nose.

My head hurt just enough so that I knew the punk had sapped me again as I was falling.

Chowder slept like he'd had a lot of practice. I had a lot of time to think. And none of the thoughts were good. I knew that Chowder wouldn't do the job himself. He'd get the punk to do it. Then he'd pay off the punk and say he did it. If it went wrong, the punk would be on a limb and Chowder would be out of town.

The Boss would never forgive me after a foulup like that. I'd never be paid more than muscle rates in the syndicate. And yet, those reasons didn't seem to be

enough for the way I felt. I felt dirty all the way through—as dirty as that pair of socks that kept me from waking up Chowder.

The feeling of being dirty was all tied up with Janet Calder. It was as though I had been living in a box and she had torn off one wall and let some light in so I could see my own pig-pen.

There aren't any other words to explain it.

VI

I stayed right there, thinking thoughts that hurt, until, as the windows started to get gray with dawn, and the light from the lamp began to look watery and pale, there was the sound of a key in the lock, and the punk came in. He was a dark kid, with a weak mouth and long sideburns.

He saw that my eyes were open and he said, "Good morning, Glory!"

I got a look at his eyes and saw that he was hopped. Chowder was a damn fool to use a snowbird for that kind of a deal.

He shook Chowder, and the broad white face slowly came back to life, the eyes squinting at the light, the little upside down U of a mouth working as though there was a bad taste inside.

"Whatsa time?" he demanded.

"Six. I just got back from the freight yard. I can get in okay. Everything set?"

"Sure. Get on your horse. Don't let the driver see you when you sap him. You saw the street. And I showed you the picture of Fosting. Cruise along behind him until the street is empty. Then go in fast, Joey."

Joey left. Chowder squinted at me and heaved himself out of the chair. He tested the neckties he had used to tie my wrists. Five-dollar ties. And he had soaked them in water to get the knots tight enough. He cuffed me alongside the head, making my ear ring.

Then he went into the bathroom and pulled the door shut. I pulled hard, but those were good ties.

They hadn't tied my ankles to the footboard. They had just tied them together.

I swung my legs up over my head until I was standing on the back of my neck. I got my toes on the headboard and pushed. The headboard was a good foot from the wall. They had moved the bed out, apparently, to fasten the knots and hadn't pushed it back.

I got my numb fingers wrapped around the posts.

As I pushed with my legs, wood splintered and with a sudden, startling crash the whole pillow end of the bed dropped onto the floor.

I rolled up onto my feet,

bringing the headboard with me. I held it above my head. I struggled for balance, made one hop toward the bathroom door. It was a good thing the room was small.

The bathroom door swung open and a startled Chowder ran out. I swung down with all my strength and the edge of the headboard hit him right at where his hairline would have been if he'd had hair on top. It was no gentle whack.

He went back into the bathroom faster than he had come out. He slid across the short tiled space and piled up half under the john. I turned sideways to get the headboard into the bathroom, and hopped in. When I got close enough to him, I jumped up in the air and came down on his face with my heels. It had to be that way because my ankles were tied together. The bad footing spilled me, and I hurt my back as I fell.

I soon found out that I couldn't roll back up onto my feet in that restricted space. On my fanny, I inched over to the sink, reached up, and knocked my razor off the shelf above the sink, using the leg of the headboard. It took a long time to get my numb fingers to work properly so that I could open the razor. The blade fell out. I managed to pick it up, wedge it on end in a crack between two of the tiles. In the process of slashing the damp necktie, I took a piece out of my wrist.

With one hand free, I cut the other one loose, and freed my ankles.

Chowder had stopped worrying about this world. I weigh two hundred and five. Being too eager to keep him out of action for a little while, I had put him out for a long long while—forever.

By the time I was ready to leave, it was ten minutes of seven. Knowing Chowder's habits, I felt around his pulpy middle, and felt the hard butt of the belly-gun that he kept wedged under his belt. It had no trigger-guard, no sights, and a barrel about an inch and a half long. But it throws a thirty-eight slug, plenty hard and fast.

I was telling myself that nobody was going to queer me with the Boss by knocking off somebody in the method that I was going to use.

But I wasn't believing the words I was telling myself . . .

THEY HAD made me stand to hear the fat furry foreman yell out the verdict. Even though I knew what it was going to be, it still sounded much worse than any words are supposed to sound.

The lawyer assigned to me had done his best, but there was too little for him to work with. Even if I'd told him the whole story, he wouldn't have had enough to

go on. He was willing, but he knew when he was licked.

Something was holding me up, but I didn't know what it was.

The case had been pretty simple. I'd made no attempt to cover my tracks as far as Chowder was concerned. A splinter of his cheekbone had been driven down into the brain. My heel marks were on the flesh of his face, and they had found blood on my heels.

There had even been witnesses to the second murder. Fosting was a half-block ahead of me. The big red tractor-trailer had come roaring along, not too fast. Not too fast to keep me from angling over and jumping up on the driver's side.

Ahead was Fosting. He didn't turn until the slugs from the .38 at close range broke Joey's head like a rotten melon.

Fosting turned as the truck bore down on him. I saw the comprehension, the sudden realization in his face . . .

A MAN with sweat-stains at his armpits came over to me and took my arm and urged me gently toward the door where I was supposed to go out. The judge had finished mumbling over me. The jury faces had a sick, yet satisfied look. "I sure hate to do this but I'm doing my duty." That kind of a look.

At the doorway, I turned and looked back at the courtroom. Every day of the trial she had been there. Alone. White, white face and blue-violet eyes. Wide, wide eyes. Lips I had kissed.

Maybe I looked toward her for three seconds before the guy got my arm again. Beside her was the lean, leathery face of James Fosting. He had made it for the last day. The kiss off. I wondered what he was thinking. He knew that I had wrenched the truck out of the course that would have killed him. Yet he had to cover me, to force me to drop Chowder's belly gun.

They were sitting very close together. Her lips formed a word. "Thanks."

And suddenly it seemed as if a lot of things were worth while.

But you can't go soft. Out in the hallway the guard offered me a cigarette. I said, "Don't smoke, friend. I've got none of the minor vices."

As usual the tired old gag worked. And I was in a spot to give it a little more impact than it usually had.

He caught on and he repeated the tag line. "None of the minor vices." The other guard was waiting in the hall.

Between the two of them I walked down toward the stairs.

He was giggling so that his fat belly shook. "This guy's got none of the minor vices, Harry," he said, gasping, because to him, it seemed like a very good joke.

lower level

by . . . Sam Merwin Jr.

If you're looking for a big-time criminal in a prosperous town in Westchester—there's a telephone call you may want to make!

PETER LEMIS crushed out his cigarette in the big black ashtray on the chief's desk and said, "Well, that's it in a nutshell."

Chief O'Brien regarded him mildly. He was a long, lean, wiry man in his middle thirties, a former combat captain in the Marines. He said, "Why come to me? I should think you'd want to turn this over to the F.B.I."

Lewis made a gesture of helplessness and said, "What have I got to give them? A mumbled remark by a crooked blackjack dealer dying of bullet wounds, the fact that Nick Bassett bought a ticket to Scarwood at Grand Central, and—a wide-ranging hunch. It takes more than that to get the F.B.I. moving. That's why I came up here myself."

Chief O'Brien rubbed his sandy hair with his left hand. He said, "What makes you think this Bassett got off here? If he's as slippery as he should be, he might have got off anywhere—or he might have purchased fare on the train to go further."

"I'm at least as well aware of that as you are," said Lewis. "All

We doubt if a single "oldster" amongst our readers would not experience an intense joy at the mere mention of the name "Sam Merwin." For Sam Merwin Sr. *delighted millions with his inimitable stories of youth's springtime travail in* COSMOPOLITAN *in the early nineteen-twenties. Now the gifted son of a famous dad is crashing the pocket book market right and left with his hard-hitting yarns and has brought us here a brand new, quite amazing crime saga.*

I want you to do is have your department check and see if he got off the train at Scarwood. It shouldn't be too tough. I'm sure he didn't know I was on his tail."

Chief O'Brien said, "Hmph," and picked up the photograph Lewis had placed on his desk. He added, "Looks like a lot of people—a prosperous businessman, maybe a lawyer like you."

"Except for one thing," said Lewis. "Everybody I've seen in Scarwood is wearing a sunburn. Nick Bassett has a complexion like a cake of yeast. He either doesn't burn or he hasn't been out in the open this summer. He was wearing a grey worsted suit, pinstriped, a bright blue shirt with a blue-and-white knitted tie, cordovan shoes, and a pearl-grey homburg. He carried a leather briefcase but no bags. Think that'll do it?"

"I hope so," said the chief. He drummed on the desk with his fingertips—a mambo beat. Then, "And he got on the five-thirteen?" And, at Lewis' nod, "I'll start an inquiry for you. But don't expect too much."

"You don't have to tell me that," said Lewis with a faint smile. "Remember, I'm in the business, too."

"Yeah." O'Brien nodded, and accepted a cigarette. "But I wouldn't trade jobs with you on a silver platter."

"You can say that again," said Lewis. Like most of the so-called decent citizens of Halcyon City, in the Mid-South, he had had no real idea of how deep the roots of its organized vice ran. He had thought, once he was elected District Attorney, it would be merely a matter of getting a few office-holders indicted and scaring the rest of the pimps, prostitutes, gamblers and gunmen out of town.

What neither he nor the folk who had nominated him had understood was the importance of Halcyon City, both as a regional base and sanctuary for the Syndicate. In fact, until he ran head-on into the operations of that nationwide octopus of organized crime and vice, he had been of the opinion that the Syndicate was pretty much a melodramatic creation of the newsmen who had covered the Kefauver Investigation, back in 1951.

Now, less than six months after taking office as District Attorney, he was a thousand miles away from Halcyon City, in a forlorn-hope effort to avert his own assassination. All by himself, he was seeking to put the finger on the man behind it all, a man who had evaded the efforts to locate him, of the F.B.I. and the combined forces of law enforcement with impunity. Don Quixote, he thought, had nothing on him.

Chief O'Brien stirred and said, "Well, we'll get it going. I'll

call you at the inn—oh, about five o'clock. Unless, of course, we get bull-lucky and pick up something sooner."

"Thanks, O'Brien," Lewis said. He stood up.

"One question," said the chief, getting to his own feet. "What makes you so sure I'm not on the other side? If we've got big Syndicate in Scarwood, I should think you'd—" He let it hang.

"Disregarding my flash opinion of your personal integrity, O'Brien," said Lewis, "there's an easy answer. There's only one way the man I'm after could have remained anonymous this long. Wherever he lives, he's clean as a whistle. If he weren't, something would have leaked out before this—which is something he must know even better than you and I. He'll be walking the streets, a solid good citizen."

O'Brien nodded somberly. "You could be right," he said. "But don't go getting killed around here. I've piled up a good record in this office, and I don't want any murders messing it up."

Lewis managed another smile. "O'Brien," he said, "if I'm right, Scarwood's about the safest place in the world for me right now." He lifted a hand in salute and walked outside the pleasant new brick building that was combination courthouse and police station, into the bright prosperous square with its half-timbered pseudo-Tudor shops, its expensive station wagons and convertibles, and its bronzed and casual-costly women shoppers.

A commodious, prosperous Westchester town, he thought as he got into the Buick he had rented in New York the day before—just the place for the man he was seeking to pick for a hideout. Driving back to the inn, he weighed the chain of events that had brought him there.

The underworld had made its proposition even before he was inducted as District Attorney. Mike Neeley, the bull-necked boss-gambler had laid it on the table with, "You want money. Fine. We'll cut you in. You want political power. We'll see you move on up. You want trouble. Well, we can give you that too. It's your ball, Lewis."

Lewis had refused to pick it up. He had chosen to ask for trouble from the Syndicate. It had come, first through anonymous letters and phone calls, then through the bomb in his car that mercifully failed to detonate, and finally through the Racky Fallows shooting.

Racky was a whiskey-voiced dealer in one of the mob's houses, whose blonde wife had caught the eye of a superior. When Racky squawked, threatening to sing to Lewis, he had been promptly stuffed with lead. Fallows should have been long dead when Lewis got to him.

But he had been alive, and

had managed to gasp, "Never mind who got me—they don't count. Nick Bassett is the guy you're after. He works for the top." Upon which Fallows had hemorrhaged and died.

The venomous hatred in Racky's glazing eyes rode with Lewis as he tooled his rented car through the prosperous suburban streets of Scarwood. Halcyon City could look like this, he thought—neat and safe and prosperous—if the rackets didn't have the town in a stranglehold. They had come in during the war, with a nearby Army cantonment, and they had never moved out.

Bassett, being ostensibly a business agent for a half-score big interests, had not been hard to locate. He had been staying at Halcyon City's best hotel, trading with the town's most reputable firms. But Lewis, fearing the leak in his own organization, had not dared make open inquiries. Instead, on another pretext, he had managed to take the plane ahead of Bassett to LaGuardia Field. He had been waiting in a cab outside the Administration Building when the dough-faced man emerged.

The trail had led to Grand Central Station. Lewis had been right behind his quarry at the lower level ticket booth when Bassett bought his one-way ticket for Scarwood. He would have taken the same train himself had the gates not closed in his face. Trail's end—unless Chief O'Brien picked up the scent.

At a crossroads, a hundred yards short of the inn, Lewis was halted by a red light. While his motor idled, he looked across the road at the colorful long stalls of the open Scarwood Market. He thought he had never seen such a variety of such handsome fruit and vegetables in his life. He thought, a trifle acidly, that the folk of Halcyon City had no such foods to choose from—not fresh, at any rate. It was, he supposed, the result of his home town's having been located in a one-crop district, like so much of the rest of the South. Scarwood, he had already learned, was surrounded by lush truck-farms which catered to prosperous suburban tastes.

He had lunch alone at the inn. The dining room's French windows overlooked a green lawn that sloped down to an inlet dotted with white sails and alive with the throb of small marine engines. The dining room itself was full of boys and girls and women in various table combinations. He was surprised when an attractive woman, about his own age, with gold-streaked hair and bright red lipstick, came to his table.

"Aren't you Peter Lewis?" she said.

She was Wendy Carlin, a girl who had come to two or three

fraternity dance house parties at his university before the War. Her name was Wendy Clay now, and he wondered how she had recognized him so quickly. He'd never have recognized her. He hadn't even thought of her in years. He told her he was in Scarwood on business, which was the gospel truth. But he didn't tell her the business was saving his own life. He didn't trust anyone.

"It's wonderful to see you again, Peter," she said. "You don't look a day older." And, when he had made the appropriate reply, "Why don't you come to dinner tonight? It's Friday and we're having a few friends in. I know Bill will be glad to meet you."

He said he would if he could and joined Wendy and another sun-tanned woman for coffee and cigarettes. Later, he walked out with them to the inn parking space. Wendy's station wagon was filled with fruits and vegetables.

"From across the street?" he asked and nodded toward the market.

Wendy smiled. "Martin has the most marvelous stuff. And we like to combine shopping there with lunch at the inn. You might call it mixing pleasure with pleasure."

She had been cute, he remembered now. Pretty and cute, with a half-quaint way of phrasing ordinary remarks that made them sound witty. She was still cute, he decided. He felt a pang of envy for Bill, whatever his business might be. He went back to the inn and waited.

O'Brien called a little before four. He said, "Better come on down. We've got something, but I'm afraid you won't like it."

Lewis didn't like it. Before the chief got through, he found himself wishing O'Brien weren't quite so efficient. The cab driver Nick Bassett had picked up at the station the afternoon before was there. He remembered Bassett, all right—the picture and the pasty complexion had been clear enough. And the tip had been good too—a buck.

"Where'd he go?" Lewis asked sharply.

The driver, a weedy individual in a fruit-salad sports shirt, reeled it off. The fare had arrived on the five-thirteen. He had hailed the cab, and explained that he wanted to do some shopping. He had stopped first at the Martex Drug Store, in the shopping center. There he had picked up a large box of candy. Next he had stopped at the Regal florist shop on Market Street where he had bought a gardenia corsage.

"Sounds mighty social to me," said O'Brien, half-amused, half-annoyed at having been put to so much trouble for nothing.

"Anywhere else?" Lewis asked, his hopes fading.

"Yeah, one more stop," said the driver. "He bought some pears at the Market."

"The one by the inn?" Lewis wanted to know. When the driver nodded, he asked, "Where did you take him then?"

"To Ryewood Heights," the driver said promptly. "It's a commuter drop about four miles north of here. He said something about being met there at the station and not wanting to arrive empty handed. I left him off at the station and came back to Scarwood."

When he had gone, the chief turned to Peter. "Well, there you are, Mr. Lewis. And it looks like Scarwood gets a clean bill of health after all. What's the next step—if any?"

"I'm going to follow up," said Lewis grimly. Not that he had much hope. Bassett could have gone anywhere—even back to New York.

The chief said, "There's just one thing that puzzles me. If your pal isn't on the level, he sure as hell took a lot of precautions to make himself look innocent."

"Sure," said Lewis, "or it might have been a set program. He may have been making a contact and covering his tracks."

"You're seeing dragons in shadows," O'Brien told him. "A hundred to one, he's having himself a nice, friendly weekend somewhere around Ryewood Heights. There's as many big places around there as there are around here."

"You're probably right," said Lewis. "Well, thanks a lot anyway."

He got up to go, feeling discouraged. It occurred to him for the first time that the whole arrangement might have been rigged to keep him clear of Halcyon City for a few days. But when he reached his car, he reminded himself that they would hardly have killed Racky Fallows just for that. Nor would Racky have played ball on his deathbed.

He decided that, if his thinking was getting *that* muddy, he really was seeing dragons in shadows. But he took a deep breath and hunted up a parking space near the Martex Drug Store.

A girl clerk, a sharp-eyed, sharp-voiced high-school kid, remembered Bassett. No, she had never seen him before, but he had bought a two-pound box of mixed chocolates. The proprietor of the Regal florist shop remembered Bassett also. He was a squat, evil-looking Italian-American named Ruggiero. Yes, the pale-faced man had bought roses.

At the Scarwood Market, the head clerk, a tall husky man with gold-rimmed spectacles, recalled Bassett clearly. He hadn't waited on him though. Martin, the boss, had done that. Once in a while Martin helped out like that when there was a rush of customers.

The afternoon was moving along, but Lewis kept moving with it. Somehow, Nick Bassett's behavior didn't make sense. True, he had barely caught the Scarwood train on the lower level of Grand Central. But even so, a weekend guest didn't usually buy such a combination—chocolates, gardenias and pears. There had to be, of course, some perfectly logical explanation. If there wasn't . . .

Lewis didn't like the alternatives, so he drove to Ryewood Heights as a last-gasp hope. The weedy taxi driver hadn't been exaggerating when he called it a commuter drop. It was just a parking space, a shed and a platform. The shed was adorned with weathered posters advertising various Broadway plays. One caught his eye. *Pajama Game!* This was a shell-game he'd become involved in.

A couple of lean-flanked cats were making a furious assault on an aluminum disposal can at the edge of the platform. They had the lid half off. Idly, Lewis went over and shooed them away. As he bent over to replace the lid, he caught sight of a couple of brown gardenias, tied with silver ribbon. He lifted the lid free while the cats glared at him and growled, their back-hair stiff.

Among the cigar butts and old newspapers and dead cigarettes, he had little trouble in finding the box of chocolates and a sack of pears already turning soft and brown. He thought, *For Pete's sake! What does this mean?* He went back to his rented car and sat down and tried to figure it out.

One thing it meant for sure—Nick Bassett's shopping in Scarwood had been a blind. But what for? There were two obvious answers. Either Bassett had bought the odd assortment to throw a possible follower off his trail, or he had stopped at two of the shops to cover the fact he was making a contact at the third. In either case, it was a safe bet Bassett had caught the next train back to New York, and that implied, secondarily, that Lewis' hunch about Scarwood had been right.

Bassett would hardly have left such an obvious and elaborate trail if he had been simply seeking to avoid pursuit. He could have taken care of that much more efficiently in New York City. So Bassett had come to the pretty little suburban town to talk to his boss. And if Racky Fallows had been right, it meant the trail ended there.

Lewis drove back to the inn and took a bath. The contact needn't have been a lengthy one, he told himself. Bassett could have had his report ready, and could have merely handed it over. And the man who received it wasn't likely to talk. He might in fact not even have realized its

importance. He might have been merely a trusted and trustworthy intermediary.

Holding the soap, Lewis pondered the new problem confronting him. At times, he knew, it was next to impossible to find a man you knew existed, a man whose name and description you had in hand. Like Bassett—though it hadn't been too hard to trail *him*.

But how did you find a man, even in a town the size of Scarwood, when all you knew about him was that he must exist? That was the rub. Perhaps, as Bismarck said of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, if he didn't exist, he'd have to be created. About all you could know about him was that he'd be efficient and outwardly a good citizen. He could be anyone who lived comfortably in the community. He could even be one of the faithful commuters.

Lewis dried himself and picked up the telephone. O'Brien had left his office but Lewis was able to get him at home. "Don't be too sure about your precious town, O'Brien. I found all the stuff Bassett bought dumped in an ashcan at Ryewood Heights Station."

The chief went, *"Unngh!"* like a mambo dancer and then said, "Now you've spoiled my dinner—Swiss steak, too."

"You're perfectly free to get even—any time you come to Halcyon City," Lewis said. "What now?"

O'Brien swore. "I'll have to sleep on it—not that I expect to sleep much. I still think it's for the F.B.I."

"Maybe it is—now," Lewis said. "See you tomorrow."

"To my everlasting sorrow." The chief hung up.

Lewis had barely put the phone down when it rang. Wendy Clay wanted to know if he was coming over for drinks and dinner. Lewis had forgotten all about the engagement. He decided he might as well. He'd had more than his share of luck, as well as problems, for one day. From here on, he intended to move with the chief.

Half an hour later, Lewis found himself sipping an excellent martini in the charming living room of a house of imposing dimensions, surrounded by wide lawns and a terraced garden. Having been introduced to the other guests, he was in a position to observe them closely. Anyone of them, he thought, could be the man he knew existed. Anyone of a dozen soft-spoken prosperous-looking male guests who ranged in years from late youth to middle age.

The women were out, of course. Not that America hadn't its share of ruthless women criminals from Annie Christmas to Ma Barker. But the type of authority required for the organization

whose head he was seeking demanded a purely masculine touch —if only because too many of the muscle men who had to obey orders simply would not take them from a woman.

Talk of the stock market, of boating and golf and fishing and the social events of the season eddied about him—basically the same sort of talk he had heard hundreds of times in similar gatherings in Halcyon City. For the first time, now that he knew himself to be at least physically close to his goal, he wondered what he would do if he met the shadowy figure of Bassett's boss face to face. Until that moment, he had been motivated solely by a driving urge to strike the enemy a telling blow before the enemy struck him. But granted the possibility of such a meeting, what would he do? What *could* he do?

Wendy came smiling up to him with a tray of canapes, and told him again how glad she was that he had turned up in Scarwood. "We so seldom get a chance to see any of the old crowd. Don't you think Bill's an absolute darling?" Only the faintest trace of her soft Southern accent remained.

Lewis said something appropriate and then found himself talking to a sun-tanned baldheaded man who was interested in the divorce laws in Lewis' state. "Nothing personal, mind you, but the firm I'm with is always looking for loopholes in new regions. We get a hell of a lot of divorce business."

Lewis nodded in sympathy and then the man wandered away and Bill Clay came up with another man in tow—a dark, quietly handsome man who looked as if he might have been born in the expensively tailored tropical worsted sports jacket he was wearing.

"Peter, this is Martin Dubois," Clay said. "For some reason he wants to meet you. Be nice to him. He's one of our favorite local characters. Also, he holds most of the choice location real estate in town."

Dubois—*Martin* Dubois! Martin was the name of the man who owned the fruit and vegetable market, the man who had waited on Nick Bassett personally. Lewis didn't need the slight extra pressure of Dubois' grip, the odd insistence in his eyes to know that it had happened. He didn't need Dubois' quiet, "A pleasure, Lewis. I think you and I have a few items to talk over," to realize that this was it.

Dubois went on, still quietly, "I hadn't planned to come over tonight. I seldom attend these things, but when I heard you were coming—"

Lewis found himself smiling. "Glad you made it," he said. "I was planning to look you up tomorrow."

"That," said Dubois, "is what I was afraid of."

Dinner was a buffet affair, rather lavish, with sliced turkey and ham and roast beef and various kinds of salads and desserts. Lewis chatted and laughed and got through it somehow. He had been convinced the Syndicate boss would be a prosperous community figure, but it had never occurred to him the man would be personally popular. He decided he must have been getting too many of his ideas from the movies.

Later, when they were driving alone together in Dubois' big, silent Cadillac, he said as much. Dubois smiled in the darkness and told him, "That's why I live here, Lewis. If I didn't have a normal personal life, I'd have gone as crazy as Capone did years ago."

"And you don't intend to have it broken up now. Is that it?" Lewis knew he was sweating with fear, rather than from the heat, and hated himself for it. He wondered how Dubois was feeling.

"Not if I can help it," Dubois said quietly. "I don't mind telling you your move here was not expected. You've been lucky—but you've also been smart."

"Thanks," said Lewis. Then, after a pause, "By the way, if you're planning to make this a one-way journey, I ought to warn you that Chief O'Brien knows just about everything I do."

Lewis caught Dubois' distressed glance in the flicker of a passing street lamp. Dubois said, "I thought you were smarter than that, Lewis. I asked you to come with me quite publicly, didn't I? Besides, why do you think I risked meeting you?"

"You know O'Brien knows?" Lewis asked, chilling.

"Of course, old man," Dubois said. "But you needn't be so shocked. O'Brien doesn't know I know. If you think I'd risk making my home in a town with a crooked chief, it's you who are crazy. Corruption is a two-edged sword."

"You should know," said Lewis bitterly. Here, at the end of the chase, he felt stalemated, outmaneuvered, hog-tied.

"I do," said Dubois briefly. "Let's stop the clowning now, Lewis. You've got me over a barrel, and I've got you in a cleft stick. You want Halcyon City cleaned up. I want to keep my identity concealed so I can live in peace. Is it a deal?"

"How do I know you'd keep it?" Lewis asked. "What guarantee can you give me you wouldn't have me shot down the moment I got back home?"

"None but an appeal to your common sense," Dubois said. "As a matter of fact, I want Halcyon City mopped up before it explodes like another Phenix City

and makes a mess all over the place. The profit's no longer worth the risk. I'll pull the boys and girls out and let you get the credit. You get a clean town and a career. Okay?"

"I don't know," said Lewis, his head spinning. "I still don't see why you don't simply eliminate me. You can—in a hundred ways."

"Sure," said Dubois. "But there's always Chief O'Brien. In his way, he's as well liked around here as I am. If anything should happen to him—well, I don't want an investigation this close to home. And contrary to popular belief, 'accidents' aren't as easy to arrange as they may seem. You shut up—and you clean up. Lord, man, that's what you came up here for, isn't it—that and to save your own skin?"

"Maybe." Lewis hated himself for not telling this vicemaster exactly where he could go.

"Face facts, man. You've got a responsibility—and so have I. For your private ear, I had Bassett tell the boys to go slow with you. When they bump off a District Attorney, there's always the devil to pay. Well, how about it? It strikes me that I'm putting myself in your hands at least as much as you're putting yourself in mine."

"What about Chief O'Brien?" Lewis asked.

"I'm counting on you to take care of him," said Dubois. "You simply call him and tell him you've got a new lead in the city. He'll hesitate, but he won't follow up around here. He's too afraid of uncovering a mess in his own spotless town."

"Let's see if I have it straight," said Lewis. "I call off O'Brien tomorrow and go back home and forget about you—and you pull your pimps and hustlers and dicemen and racketeers out of Halcyon City and let me take credit for it. Is that the deal?"

"That's it," said Dubois quietly. He pulled the big car to a stop on a turnaround overlooking Long Island Sound. The moonlight made a molten streak of precious metal on the smooth water.

"What makes you think I'll keep shut?" Lewis said. "You're going to have some anxious moments over that. You're not going to like it."

"You think I like having a man like Nick Bassett know?" Dubois countered. "I prefer dealing with an honest man, a man I can trust."

Lewis thought it over. He said, "What choice do I have?"

"Frankly, none." The reply was prompt. "I'd survive exposure at this stage of the game, though my life here would be wrecked. You wouldn't survive an attempt to expose me." A pause, then, "Shall we go back before too many of our friends get curious about us?"

Lewis didn't have to call O'Brien. When he got back to the inn, the Scarwood chief of police was waiting for him in the lobby. He looked as if he had been dozing in his chair, yet his eyes, though puffy, were alert. "Sorry, Lewis," he said. "I couldn't sleep. Have a good time?"

Lewis hesitated. There was no sense not telling the chief where he'd spent the evening. O'Brien would find it out anyway. He told him, and added, "I guess it was a good thing to see some nice people. It sort of gave me my perspective back again."

"What have you decided?" O'Brien asked bluntly.

"I've decided the only thing I can do is fight it out on my own home ground—in Halcyon City," said the district attorney. "Coming up here to Scarwood was a panic move. I was running away."

O'Brien just looked at him—looked at him for a long moment in silence. Then he said, "What about the stuff your man Bassett dumped at Ryewood Heights? What about the big man being here?"

Lewis felt suddenly weary. He wanted to talk to O'Brien, to tell him the truth, but for the moment his lips were sealed. "I don't know," he said. "There could have been a million reasons."

"Sure," said O'Brien. "Sure there could have been—a million of them. But there's only one we both believe."

This was proving more difficult than Lewis had expected. Yet he had to convince the chief of police. "Maybe you're right," he said. "But I think I've got a better chance of finding our boy in Halcyon City than the two of us have flying blind up here. Besides, my job . . ." He let it hang.

O'Brien gave him another long look. He said, finally, "Well, it's your funeral, Lewis. So long. If you change your mind, let me know." He walked out of the inn lobby into the night.

The following noon, when his Southbound plane pulled in at Washington Airport, Lewis was still in a state of emotional shock. Satan had offered him death or a kingdom, and he had accepted the kingdom. He tried to rationalize what he had done. His job was to clean up Halcyon City and he had arranged to have it done. The underworld would move on somewhere else, and surely that was not his responsibility. Surely not . . .

But he wasn't really fooling himself. A sellout was a sellout, whatever the price received.

Besides, Dubois had as good as told him he'd be killed before the Syndicate allowed him to talk. He glanced covertly at his fellow passengers, wondering which of them was not what he

seemed, which of them was prepared to cut him down at the first sign he gave of reaching for the wrong telephone.

Was it the gum-chewing blonde with the hard blue eyes he had caught looking at him furtively over her magazine a half dozen times? Was it the dark little man with the brightly-shined black shoes and hair to match? Was it the quiet-looking grey-haired man who seemed lost in paperwork across the aisle?

Or was it somebody else, even less likely?

All at once, Lewis had to know. The gangplank was down and some sort of important official was coming aboard, had paused to chat with the trim stewardess at the foot of the stairs. The plane was still refueling. Whoever was spying on him would hardly dare try to shoot him from the plane. He could reach the circular administration building, which was swarming with MP's and cops. In a matter of minutes, he'd be telling his story in F.B.I. Headquarters across the river, in the shadow of the Washington Monument. The impulse was overpowering.

Lewis moved fast. He was outside the plane like a shot and down the steps. The stewardess said matter-of-factly, "We're taking off again in ten minutes, Mr. Lewis."

The important official regarded him with mild curiosity.

Every step he took toward the administration building was an invitation to a bullet in his back. But no bullet came his way, no pistol barked its sharp deadly message in the sunlight behind him. When, having reached the doors of the building, he turned to look behind him, none of the other passengers had left the ship.

He thought about calling the F.B.I. But what could he tell them? That he suspected somebody on the plane—one of thirty passengers—without knowing which one? They wouldn't laugh at him. But their brushoff would be swift and effective. He decided to walk back to the plane, to fly on to Halcyon City, to carry on with the deal.

Then he hesitated, thinking again of Martin Dubois, again of Chief O'Brien. Maybe the F.B.I. couldn't help him—but O'Brien was ready to. What had been his parting shot at the inn? ". . . if you change your mind, let me know."

He couldn't go on, wondering who was watching him, spying on his every move. That was worse than police state submission, worse than accepting communism—for what he was accepting wasn't even a doctrine for human behavior. It was out and out thievery, corruption and murder.

He couldn't afford to let Dubois' agents intimidate him. Be-

ing beaten up or killed would be worse for him as a person, more destructive for the integrity on which his life was based, than merely continuing to exist in a life of selling out and fear. No one had a right to keep him from making a telephone call.

He entered the booth, dialed 211, asked for Police Headquarters in Scarwood, New York.

Chief O'Brien sounded weary and disillusioned as he came on with, "O'Brien speaking. Who is it?"

Lewis almost shouted, "Hang on to your hat, man. I'm coming back!"

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SD 62

the riviera renegade

by . . . Lawrence G. Blochman

A man who is not ashamed to confess quite openly to murder may shrink from a darker charge.

ACCORDING to the newspapers, Monsieur le Juge, you are the Examining Magistrate in the case of James Patterson, the American soldier who was arrested last night while carrying the body of a woman named Mimi Lacourt from a bench on the Promenade des Anglais. The papers say the soldier was about to dispose of the body in the sea, but—

You have already turned the boy over to the Americans for court martial? But I tell you the French civil courts must retain jurisdiction in this case. You must insist, Monsieur le Juge, because the Americans will hang Jim Patterson—and they must not hang him. Let me tell you why.

My name is Paul Murdock. I hesitated about coming to you, Monsieur le Juge, because people in Nice call me a renegade, a bad American, and a collaborationist.

It is true that I did not return to America when Marshal Pétain surrendered—perhaps because I was too comfortable in my Ri-

When Lawrence Blochman isn't entertaining us with his superlative tales of men in white engaged in a pitiless struggle against clinical skullduggery via the arsenic route he's likely to become an examining magistrate in just such a French Riviera mystery as this, with its chilling, hour-glass quality of suspense. Attend then, with bated breath, as the sands dwindle and terror mounts.

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viera villa, perhaps because I have lived in France for forty years, perhaps because, although I am no longer young, I still love to paint the red sea-cliffs and the olive-covered hills and the pink and green and yellow houses drowsing in the sun beside the blue Mediterranean.

It is also true that I was frequently seen drinking apéritifs with Maggiore Giacomo of the Italian Armistice Commission, which is the reason, people say, that I was not molested by the Occupation forces. But I should like to point out, Monsieur le Juge, that I knew Maggiore Giacomo when he was a buyer for a New York art dealer. He was caught by the war in Rome, and being as easy-going and apolitical as I, he preferred a commission in the Italian Army to a Fascist concentration camp. He was a man of the world, and it was pleasant to dine with him and his beautiful French mistress.

When the Americans landed in North Africa and the Germans overran the Riviera, Maggiore Giacomo returned to Italy. I cannot swear that he bequeathed his mistress to Oberstleutnant Fritsch of the Gestapo. But I do know that when she asked for the address of an artist friend of mine named Bertrand and I gave it to her—I did not dream that an artist would be working for the underground—Bertrand was arrested and shot.

I lived in terror for the next few weeks. I think I was more terrified by the fact that the Germans did not molest me than of the possibility of being sent to Germany and interned. At last I fled to a mountain village back of Saint-Sauveur.

For nearly two years I lived like a peasant. It was not agreeable, but it was safe, and it was far from the war—so far, in fact, that when my countrymen landed on the southern coast and swept up the Rhône valley and over the Alps, I was ashamed to go out to greet their liberating columns.

When the Germans surrendered, however, and the Riviera became the rest and recreation area for the American Army, I came back to the coast. In Cannes I again ran into my friend Maggiore Giacomo, only now he was Mr. Giacomo and wore civilian clothes. After the Americans came to Italy, he had thrown away his Fascist uniform, produced his U. S. citizenship papers, and gone to work for Military Government to help locate art treasures the Germans had stolen.

When I saw Giacomo in Cannes, he was on his way back to New York. We had a very gay dinner together. I say "very gay" although it was also a little sad, because Giacomo's French mistress was with us, and when

she was not weeping prettily between courses over the prospect of losing her lover again after such a short reunion, the sight of her reminded me of my poor friend Bertrand who had been shot by the Gestapo after she had asked me for his address.

Yes, I know, Monsieur le Juge, this seems to have no bearing on the case of Jim Patterson and the murder on the Promenade des Anglais. But it is all pertinent. You see, Giacomo's girl friend was Mimi Lacourt.

A few weeks ago I came back to Nice—a strange Nice, you must admit. The Promenade is brown with G.I.'s, the great court of the Hotel Negresco is loud with beer-drinking lads from Kansas and Vermont and Montana, the elegant casinos crowded with rustics in khaki eating hot dogs and drinking Red Cross coffee, the lovely sea-front terraces of the fine hotels littered with Coca-Cola bottles.

I suppose I was disgusted at first. I was shocked to see canned beer from the PX on tables once graced by champagne of the finest vintage. I was horrified, but I was fascinated. And after a while I was ashamed again.

Perhaps it was the sound of these young American voices that brought back memories of my own boyhood on the rolling prairies of the Middle West. Perhaps it was my advancing age that nudged me into reaching backward toward the womb, thinking of my American beginnings, remembering homely little scenes that I had forgotten for many years because I wanted to forget them.

Perhaps it was the realization that these healthy, noisy, somewhat vulgar boys were displacing the Germans and Italians—who had better manners—by right of conquest, a right bought with their own blood.

Deliberately, Monsieur le Juge, as though I were doing penance, I forced myself to make friends with the G.I.s. I was in turn adopted by one of them from Iowa, my own state, a lad named Jim Patterson, who called me "Pop."

I showed Jim the cellars of the Old City where we tasted *vin du Cap* and talked of Iowa. We ate trout fresh from the rushing waters of the Loup. We explored the Valley of the Var and the slopes of Bellet where the wine has the color of old amber and the fragrance of spring wild flowers.

Jim told me he had fallen madly in love with a French girl, and wanted me to meet her. The day he received his commanding officer's permission to marry the girl, I invited them to dine with me in that little gray-market restaurant on the Quai des Etats-Unis where the lobsters are sheer ambrosia.

I was stunned, Monsieur le Juge, to discover that Jim's fiancée was Mimi Lacourt.

You knew Mimi Lacourt, of course. Everyone knew her—many quite intimately. She was a glittering ornament to our Casinos before the war. She was extremely beautiful, as you know, with dark eyes that turned men's blood to strong wine. She wore clothes with an art that displayed her superb body as a jeweler exhibits a fabulous gem in his showcase. I could understand how Jim had fallen in love with her.

But how was I to make Jim understand that this woman was as evil as she was beautiful, as false as she was desirable? I could not tell him that Mimi had betrayed my friend Bertrand to the Gestapo because I have no proof, and if any proof existed beside my circumstantial evidence, Mimi would have been arrested with the other traitors.

I could not say: "Jim, your Mimi has a heart like an artichoke with a leaf for every man. She will never belong to you alone. If she belongs to anyone, it will be to Giacomo, whose bed she favored for five years. If you take her to the States you will be taking her to Giacomo or to some new Oberstleutnant Fritsch, because Mimi does not love men; she uses them."

I could not say this, Monsieur le Juge, because Jim was certain that Mimi loved him. She had told him so, and she kissed him convincingly. She was a consummate actress.

I had no chance to talk to either of them alone that night, but next morning—Mimi always slept until noon—Jim and I went to Antibes. As we sunned ourselves on the beach, I tried to show Jim why his marriage would not work out. I told him that after the glamor and glitter of the Riviera, Mimi would never be happy in a small Midwestern town.

"Besides," I said, "you know the folks at home think all French women are sinful wenches. Your own family will probably never accept her. She will be miserable."

"I know that Mimi has led a pretty gay life around here," Jim said. "She told me so herself. But all that's in the past and I'm not jealous of the past. All that matters now is that she loves me, and that I love her."

"Suppose she is lying," I said. "Suppose some day you find out that she never really loved you."

Jim looked at the backs of his big, bronzed hands. "If that happened," he said, "I think I could kill her."

He turned his hands over and closed them slowly. For a long time he stared at his fists. Then he said: "Pop, my leave's up in three days and I'm moving to a staging area to be sent home.

So Mimi and I are getting married tomorrow. I wanted you to be one of my witnesses, but—"

He paused, uneasy. I said: "I know. People told you I collaborated with the enemy and was not a fit person to be witness at a soldier's wedding. Don't worry, Jim. I won't embarrass you. I won't come."

"You don't mind, Pop?"

"Of course not. I'm going to be pretty busy anyway."

I was indeed very busy. I had to act quickly. I saw only one chance of saving Jim from a tragic mistake. It was a forlorn chance, but I had to take it. I had to see Mimi alone, to talk her out of marrying Jim. I got word to her, and she agreed to meet me that night on the Promenade des Anglais.

We sat on a bench near one of those ridiculous pillboxes the Germans had painted to resemble newspaper kiosks. I asked her bluntly, "Why do you tell this boy you love him, when you are marrying him only to get to the United States to join Giacomo? Or is it something more sinister than Giacomo—like Oberstleutnant Fritsch?"

She laughed. Her laugh was as musical and as cold as the tinkle of ice in a tall glass. She denied nothing.

"I am fond of Jim," she said. "He is just a boy, but he is a nice boy. Can anyone foretell how a marriage will end these days? But however it ends, Jim should have no regrets. He will have undreamed-of happiness. Is it not miraculous luck for a simple farm boy to possess a beautiful woman who has been fought over by princes of the blood, by men of power and great wealth? Could he find such glorious ecstasy in his native cornfields?"

"You are a fool, Mimi," I said. "When Jim finds out what you have done to him, he will kill you—and not by proxy, as you killed Bertrand."

Again she laughed—that selfish, confident, cynical laugh of hers. And as she laughed, she seemed to be laughing for me, echoing my own self-centered love of comfort, my denial of sacrifice, my superiority to the world which I disdained, my withdrawal from my own kind. For forty years I had been laughing with shallow gaiety, piling up a debt to society, to men like Bertrand.

And as Mimi suddenly stopped laughing, I knew that I might repay that debt in part by saving one American boy from humiliation and disillusion, perhaps from worse. So I killed her.

I strangled Mimi Lacourt, Monsieur le Juge, with my own hands. They are old hands, but they were strong for a few moments last night while I paid my debt. I left the woman lying on the bench by the sea. I did not

Please turn to page 84

the ragged pedestrian

by . . . Michael Innes

Appleby was sure that Mrs. Lorio was an evil woman. But he wasn't quite prepared for the ghastly tragedy below High Head Cliff.

"HUMAN ACTION," remarked the surgeon, "is often oddly disproportionate to the motives prompting it. Men are frequently driven to suicide solely by boredom and to murder by simple curiosity."

The most analytical of his listeners stretched out his hand for the decanter. "I would not have put it so simply," he said. "Boredom makes us long for some decisive action, and killing a man is surely the most decisive action we are capable of. By the same token, curiosity is stirred most decisively by the secret of the grave. And our chance of solving *that* lies in ourselves descending into it and not in giving a lethal push to someone perhaps less curious. Appleby, this is an excellent port."

"I've seen a good many cases of homicide." The K. C. cracked a walnut and inspected its kernel with care. "That some had boredom behind them and some curiosity I won't deny. But a far larger proportion had respectability."

"Respectability?" The surgeon put down his glass. "My dear sir,

There is a rare-vintage mellowness as well as a lethal flavor about Michael Innes' always distinctive excursions into murder. And the inimitable ingenuity which has brought delight to his many readers on both sides of the Atlantic is brightly in evidence in this exciting short story, indubitably one of his best.

you alarm me. My own respectability is most pronounced."

The K. C. chuckled. "Well, keep your wits about you. The desire to retain one's respectability can be a terrible killer. I'm sure our host agrees with me."

There was a pause, which grew expectant as Appleby silently watched the decanter returning to him around the little table. "Yes," he said presently, "that seems completely logical. I've known a woman who poisoned her husband in a particularly horrible and lingering way rather than ruin her reputation with the neighbors by just going off with another man. And then, of course, there was the Lorio case. Strange, unusual, and more than a little frightening? Well, suppose you be the judge of that.

"I was a young man at the time, and having my first holiday since being sent into the C. I. D. It was not a very exciting holiday, for I was spending it with my aunt at Sheercliffe—a retreat to which she withdrew periodically from the harassing life of Harrogate. It was she who sent me to make the Lorios' acquaintance.

"Robert Lorio, it seems, came of a good Yorkshire family, which meant that my aunt had him down in a sort of social card-index of persons who did not quite deserve to be lost sight of. Most people, I found, *had* lost sight of Lorio, and of his wife Monica, as well. They lived in complete isolation, in a farmhouse that no longer had anything to do with a farm, about a couple of miles outside the little town. The tremendous cliff from which the place takes its name was close by; and about a mile farther on again it piled itself up in the famous landmark called High Head.

"My aunt had no intention of calling on these people herself. They existed in far too small a type in her index for *that*. It was simply a matter of sending me out with a courteously-phrased message of recognition. So off I went one windy morning, and presented myself at the farmhouse. Lorio proved to be a glum, commonplace-looking man of middle age, whose only notion of impressing the world seemed to have been to grow a short black beard. The dismal condition known as 'reduced circumstances' was written all over him, and all over his house. You could see the unfaded places on the walls from which some pictures or cabinet had been spirited away to end finally in a second-hand furniture dealer's storerooms.

"Monica Lorio was dark like her husband. She was, at the same time, much younger and she had a fine body beneath a slatternly rag of a dress which rippled with the kind of grace that could profoundly disturb a man. You just couldn't look at that woman without feeling there was something

darkly evil about her. It was she who entertained me, after a fashion, while her husband, with one hand deep in the pocket of his shabby tweeds and the other playing with the ears of a large shaggy dog, did little more than stare at me morosely.

"Mrs. Lorio stared at me, too, for that matter—and then her eyes would wander to Lorio with a look I didn't like. Or they would stray out of the window to a tumbledown barn at the bottom of the garden, and thence to the loneliness—for it was certainly that—of the moor and cliff beyond.

"You will have no doubt guessed that I hated the whole thing. What I find difficult to convey is the inexplicable intensity of my feeling. I sat there talking rubbish about my aunt's health and the state of the weather, and all the time there was growing on me the conviction that I had strayed into the presence of some insidious approximation to absolute evil. When I got back that evening, and my aunt asked me about Monica Lorio, a completely honest answer would have been: 'She is a woman who has sold herself into some depth of degradation I can't at all fathom'. But you don't speak quite that candidly to an aunt—or not to *my* aunt, at any rate. So I simply said she was pretty, and let it go at that.

"Will it surprise you to learn that I took to walking that way almost every day? The views were magnificent, but I'm inclined to suspect that it was my incipient detective faculties that were at work. On one occasion they actually took me through the yard at the back of the house, although I'd have hated to be seen by one of the Lorios and sociably received once more. Well, for a moment I thought I *had* been seen by Monica, though not with the kindling of emotions in any way sociable. For there she was, peering covertly out from the side of an uncurtained window and glaring at me with a sort of gloating malignity that made my heart jump.

"At least, it seemed to be me she was staring at. Then I realized that she was really glancing straight past me at something else. I turned my head, but I saw nothing at first but the Lorios' great dog, lying in the sun scratching itself. I was about to turn away when, just for a second and turning a corner of the barn, I glimpsed a slouching listless figure in shabby lovat tweed and a black beard.

"Lorio was not the kind of man I could have warmed up to, but in that moment I felt genuinely sorry for him. He was no good. The whole tumbledown place bore witness to that; and his wife, who clearly had vitality and ambition, hated him as a failure. It was a sombre and sor-

did picture, and I decided that my curiosity had had about enough. Nevertheless, it got another dose later that day.

"I walked a good many miles along the cliffs, lunched in a pleasant, small tavern and came back by the shore. You can do that until you are within about a mile and a half of High Head. From there onward the cliffs drop sheer to deep water, and you have to climb again and go along the top of them. Well, I was down there by the shore still. It was sunny and warm; I sat down in a little coign to read, and very presently I was asleep. I don't think I slept very long, and when I awoke it was to the sound of voices coming from less than a dozen yards away—from the next little hollow, to be exact—among the sandhills. One of the voices was a woman's and I recognized it instantly as Mrs. Lorio's. The other was a man's, and it was certainly not her husband's.

"I didn't hear the actual conversation, but it wasn't the sort of talk in which the words hold much significance in themselves. In fact it was unmistakably the low murmuring of lovers. I was extremely disconcerted. You see, I had set out that morning with a restless curiosity about the Lorio's in my head. And now here I was, without the least intention of eavesdropping, skulking like a private investigator at the door of a hotel bedroom. So I beat a hasty retreat. I hadn't yet learned that policemen can't afford generous feelings. On this occasion, if I had just done a little judicious spying . . . But I see that you are getting impatient."

Appleby paused, and the K. C. nodded approvingly. "We are taking it for granted there is going to be a tragic outcome. Is it too much to infer that our friend Lorio comes to a sudden and sticky end?"

"Sudden—yes. But I don't know that I'd call it sticky." Appleby paused to draw at his cigar. "There's no detective novel coloration about this, you know. I'm just telling you a straight yarn."

"A simple bedtime story." The surgeon pushed an ash-tray towards the K. C. and chuckled. "Or that at least was the turn it seemed to be taking when you broke off. Go on, my dear Appleby."

"Well then, after that I was determined never to see a Lorio again. But I was out of luck. For the very next day Robert Lorio called on my aunt. That was only a natural social courtesy, no doubt. It surprised me, nevertheless. The man had seemed too sunk in his private miseries—whatever they might be—to give a thought to social forms. However, there he was; and when he left I strolled along the cliff with him and tried to be relaxed and friendly. In this it seemed that I was surprisingly successful, for

three or four days later he turned up again and suggested we go for another walk.

"And walk we did—then, and on a couple of later occasions. Young and conceited though I was, I don't think it ever occurred to me that my companionship was a pleasure to him. He did his best to make himself agreeable. We looked at such antiquities as the countryside possessed and he talked about them with considerable animation. But it was easy to see he had something on his mind.

"At first I thought that he was anxious to unburden himself, and was grooming me for the role of a confidential friend. But then I realized that there was more to it than that. I remembered with something of a shock that I was a police officer in the C. I. D. Perhaps Lorio was clinging to me in my professional character. I had already done some tagging around as bodyguard to more than one important person and it occurred to me that Lorio was trying to place himself unofficially in the same category.

"The man was afraid. When I grasped that simple and disturbing truth about him, and when I pictured him in that lonely house with his hell-cat of a wife, and her lover lurking perhaps in the next village, I—well, I felt thoroughly sorry for the man. He must have led a dog's life. I think I even felt a bit alarmed—although I didn't, so far as I can remember, at all anticipate what you've called a respectability murder, or anything of the sort. He seemed unable to talk about his private affairs—*really* to talk, that is—and I believe that at the end of our third walk I'd have questioned him outright. Only that third walk never had an end.

"It differed from the earlier walks in two ways. First, we didn't have Rex, the shaggy dog. And that seemed to make Lorio's nervousness and apprehensiveness worse. For normally the animal would take great sweeps around us and Lorio would follow it affectionately with his eye. Then it would dash up and fawn on him, and he would give it a quick thrust away with his arm, and off it would go again.

"Now, not having the dog to look at, he kept staring at his watch instead—for all the world, I thought, as if he were Dr. Faustus waiting for the fateful stroke of midnight. The other difference was in the weather. There was a gale blowing that made walking thoroughly hard work, and the sea beneath us was tremendous. For we had taken the cliff path past Lorio's own house and were climbing steadily towards High Head. We had been silent for some time—needing, as was only natural, all our breath to face that tremendous wind—when he muttered something incoherent about the dog.

"I gathered presently that it had disappeared that morning and that he was worried about it. I tried to sound sympathetic, but I was more worried about the man himself. His agitation was growing, and it struck me that he must be a bit mad about the brute. Perhaps he gave it the affection that would have been rejected with hostility by his wife, or, at the very least, completely wasted on her.

"As it happened, I ought to have been more worried than I was. For Robert Lorio had then just about thirty minutes to live.

"There is a motor road leading right to the brow of High Head, and as we approached it I saw three or four parked cars and a little knot of people standing at a discreet distance from the edge. That was only to be expected, since when a gale is blowing the spectacle from up there is justly famous. For a stretch of about fifty yards the top of the cliff breaks down into a system of jagged rocks, crazy ledges and rudimentary caves, with here and there a thorn or a clump of gorse clinging desperately to the earth above an utter void. Then there is simply sheer precipice, and the breakers that crash and roar and seethe I don't know how many hundred feet beneath.

"I have a pretty tolerable head for heights, but I can tell you that on that morning I was disposed to keep well away from the edge. With Lorio, however, it was quite the opposite. He seemed drawn to the edge and I followed him—or at least I kept sufficiently close to hear his sudden cry before it was caught by the gale and blown to limbo. 'It's Rex,' he shouted. 'Rex! He's trapped!'

"Sure enough, there was the dog, cowering on a narrow ledge some twenty feet below us. It was an unnerving enough sight. Yet my instant calculation was that the animal was *not* trapped; and that with a little encouragement it could be persuaded to come up as it had, apparently, gone down. Of any other trap being in question I hadn't a notion.

"Before I knew what he was about, Lorio had started to scramble down toward the animal. I called to him not to be a fool, but he waved his hand and went on. There seemed, as I've said, to be a practicable path, up which Rex might have been whistled. For a man, the difficulty seemed to be that it was in two places, each sharply overhung. The second of these, which was right on the edge, so that the slightest slip or miscalculation in traversing it would have led to instant disaster, was partly obscured by a great boulder. A couple of the spectators up on the Head, seeing that something unusual was happening, had strolled down to investigate. We waited breathlessly together. It was a moment in which

it would have appeared like murder to call out a single word.

"Lorio came to this last and critical place, and I could see him hesitate. Then he bent low to creep past the over-hang. First his head disappeared, followed by his shoulders in that shabby tweed, and finally all we could see was a single foot, edging cautiously out of sight an inch at a time. It seemed an eternity before anything appeared at the other side.

"At last one of the men standing beside me exclaimed softly, and I saw an arm. It was groping for a hold—and then it was flailing wildly in air. I recall in that horrible instant a most extraordinary association of ideas. What that arm fantastically suggested to me was the conductor of an orchestra, working up some terrific coda. And at that random thought my ears were opened. I heard—what I had been unconscious of an instant before—the roar and crash of the tremendous seas below. I heard, too, a single ghastly scream. For a split second the whole man was visible, the gale lifting his jacket. His curved back was pillowed on the void, and his bearded mouth gaped in that last despairing scream. Then he was gone.

"Have you noticed that when you try to picture such a fall you see the *progress* of it—the object, whatever it may be, on its actual journey through the air? The reality isn't like that at all. The speed is so great that it is over as one looks. I think I was aware of that tremendous fall not in terms of distance but of size. At one instant a man had hovered in agony before me; at the next a small black blob hit the sea.

"There was, of course, nothing whatever to do. I knew very well that what I had seen was sudden death. Nevertheless, I raced to the coastguard hut on the other side of High Head. For some reason it was deserted. But I knew it had a telephone. So I broke in through a window and sent a message to the lifeboat station in Sheercliffe. Even though I knew Lorio to be beyond help, I felt better for having done it.

"All this took about fifteen minutes. When I got back to the scene of the accident there was quite a crowd collected. The people who had come up to the Head by car were pointing, jabbering, and cautiously exploring the edge of the cliff. In fact they were getting more of a thrill out of their expedition than they had expected.

"One group was in particular agitation, and in a moment I saw why. Rex had apparently managed to rescue himself after all, as I had thought he might very well succeed in doing. They were patting him, shaking their heads over him, shouting at him against the gale, and generally driving the poor brute frantic. He gave a howl. And at that moment a hand

fell on his collar and quieted him. It was Mrs. Lorio's. How she had come upon the scene wasn't clear.

"She was as pale as a ghost, and wildly questioning the folk around her. One of the two men who had stood by me and watched the thing happen was trying to explain the accident. But he was confused and stammering. I had no liking for the job, but I saw that I must step up to her and tell her exactly what had happened.

"*Or did she already know?* If suspicion had been slow to stir in me, it came flooding in now. I hadn't actually seen the dead man *begin* to fall. He had disappeared for a second, and then I had seen him completely off-balance and falling. And the terrain below the edge was quite problematical. I only knew that before the cliff fell away sheer there were those dizzy little paths and ledges, with here and there niches and shallow caves where a man intent on murder could easily have concealed himself. What if Monica Lorio's lover had been lurking there—or even the two of them together? What if the dog had been no more than a decoy?

"These questions answered themselves in about thirty seconds. Or rather Rex answered them. He had become restless again, and was straining against his mistress's hand on his collar. Suddenly his restlessness changed to violent excitement. He broke away, and was off along the top of the cliff like a flash.

"What he was after became clear in a moment. About a hundred yards away a ragged pedestrian with a large bundle on a stick was walking briskly towards Sheercliffe. He might have been a tramp who had paused on the outskirts of the little crowd to see what had happened and who was now going on his way.

"Rex was up with him like lightning. For an instant I thought he was going to fly at the fellow's throat. But all he did was to leap up at him in mere joy and affection. And the ragged man pushed him off with a quick thrust.

"I'd have recognized that gesture anywhere, and I put on a spurt of speed that wouldn't have disgraced Rex himself. As I came up on him the fellow turned and faced me. He was dark and clean-shaven—for a tramp, quite absurdly clean-shaven. Our eyes met, and he knew that I *knew*. Horror and despair flooded his face. Then he took the simplest course open to him. He turned, ran, and jumped. This time I didn't see the body fall. But the result could be in no doubt. Robert Lorio had gone to join his victim. Monica Lorio had not the same courage. She was hanged."

"I seem to recall," said the K. C., "that you said there was no mystification in this story?"

"There wasn't very much. Robert and Monica Lorio were devoted to each other—and in desperate circumstances. Their only possible financial resource was a very substantial insurance policy on Robert Lorio's life. That was the position when one day a tramp turned up at Mrs. Lorio's back door. He was of about her husband's build, dark, and not particularly intelligent. He was also, as it turned out, open to suggestion—criminal suggestion.

"Her plan must have come to her instantaneously. She lodged him in the barn, pretending to conceal his presence from her husband. She admitted him as a lover. Hence the amorous murmurings I overheard when I awakened that afternoon by the sea. And hence, too, the malignity of her glance at him earlier that day, when I had taken him for her husband. She didn't much like the role she had to play.

"By that time he was already groomed for his part—wearing Lorio's beard, and Lorio's old clothes. You can see what she had persuaded him would happen. They would conceal themselves in a little cave below the brow of the cliff when Lorio was taking one of his regular walks. They would use Rex as a decoy to lure him down and then they would pitch him over the precipice to his death.

"She succeeded in convincing her not too bright accomplice, no doubt, that if the body was ever discovered it would be unrecognizable. And meanwhile there would simply be a new Robert Lorio.

"So from the tramp's point of view, you see, it really was a special sort of respectability murder that was going forward. But in sober actuality it was nothing of the sort. It was a mercenary murder. And the wretched man was cast for the role not of accomplice but of victim.

"The Lorios' plan was complex—but it was feasible. There was to be an observer; and nothing less than a rising young officer from Scotland Yard! The real Robert Lorio was to go to the rescue of his dog, disappear for a moment, and then *seem* to fall to his death. But really it was to be the tramp, whose body would almost certainly be recovered some days afterwards and identified as Lorio's.

"Meanwhile Lorio in the cave was to shave and change and he and his wife were separately to slip quietly back to ground level. And while she distracted attention by making a scene, he was simply to clear out. When she had collected the insurance money they would have joined up again in Canada.

"Well, it nearly worked. From the moment that Lorio began looking nervously at his watch the timing of the thing was per-

fect. So was whatever scheme they had down there for instantaneously turning the tables on their miserable dupe—getting him off-balance and over the edge. One can't be very sorry for *him*. His death was decidedly a case of the would-be biter being bit. But the last bite, so to speak, was Rex's. He betrayed the whole thing when it appeared to be all over except the shouting."

Appleby paused. "The memory of those two deaths is horrible to me still. But not, in retrospect, so horrible as waking up that afternoon and hearing the murmuring voices of Monica Lorio and the man she was preparing to murder."

(*Concluded from page* 74)

THE RIVIERA RENEGADE

know she had told Jim Patterson to meet her there half an hour after she was meeting me, that the police would find Jim lifting her from the bench, carrying her —not to fling her into the sea, but to seek help.

So you see, Monsieur le Juge, why this is a case for the civil courts. I ask no mercy. I ask only that when you inform the American military authorities that they should release Jim Patterson, you should tell them—and Jim—that while I am a murderer, I was not a collaborationist, that I am not really a bad American.

the black cabinet

by . . . John Dickson Carr

A political assassination is always the act of an idiot. It changes nothing. But Nina's "Idiot" was the strangest man on Earth.

AS THE Emperor's closed carriage swung towards the private entrance at the Opera, with the gentlemen's carriages ahead and the white horses of the Imperial Guard clattering behind, three bombs were thrown from the direction of the Opera steps.

And, only a minute before, a small nine-year-old girl in the crowd had been almost mutinous.

She was too grown-up, Nina thought, to be lifted up in *maman's* arms as though she were four years old or even six. True, the fusty-smelling coats and tall hats of the men, even the bonnets and crinolines of the women, made so high a black hedge that Nina could see little except the gas-jets illuminating the façade of the Opera and the bright lamps of the Parisian street. But it was warm down here: warm, at least, for a night in mid-January of 1858.

Then up Nina went, on the arm of *maman*. Already they could hear in the distance the measured applause—the slow,

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When John Dickson Carr pens an historical mystery yarn as startlingly dramatic as the little gem of detection presented here the welkins ring truly—and with a loud and compelling clarity. For in a recent poll of mystery readers and editors on both sides of the Atlantic Mr. Carr was acclaimed as one of the ten best living mystery fiction writers. With this judgment we are wholly disposed to concur. But, if we may be forgiven, we'd like to add that in bringing the past vividly to life—as in this story—we consider him preeminent.

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steady, clap-clap of hands, as at a play—and a ragged cheer as the procession approached.

But Nina did not even know what it was, or why they were here.

"Mother, I—" she began in French.

Maman's bonnet, lined with ruffles, was so long-sided that Nina could not see her mother's face until it was turned round. Then *maman's* dark Italian eyes, always so kindly, took on a glassy bulging glare of hatred and triumph as she pressed her lips against Nina's long curls; bright brown curls, like the hair of Nina's American father.

"Look well!" whispered the handsome Signora Maddelena Bennett, in the Italian language. "At last you will see the death of the devil."

And Nina understood. She too hated, as she had been taught to hate, without knowing why. She had been schooled not to sob or tremble. Yet tears welled up in her eyes, because Nina was sick with fear. In one of those carriages must be Napoleon the Third, Emperor of the French.

Clop-clop, clop-clop moved the horses; slowly, but ever nearer the carpet of white sand spread in front and at the side of the Opera. Then, suddenly, Signora Bennett's whole expression changed. She had never dreamed that the murderers—Orsini and his conspirators—would hold their hands so long, or might throw bombs from the very side or steps of the Opera itself.

"No!" she shrieked aloud.

Holding the child closely, Signora Bennett flung the side of her fur pelisse over Nina's head and dropped down into the half-frozen mud among the spectators. Just as she fell, a black object flew over the heads of the crowd, high-sailing against gas-lamps.

Through a crack between the fur pelisse and *maman's* fashionable deep-bosomed gown with the steel buttons, Nina saw the edge of a white flash. Though they were protected, the first explosion seemed to crush rather than crash, driving steel needles through her eardrums. There were two more explosions, at seconds' intervals. But the street went dark at the first crash, blinding the gas-lamps, setting the air a-sing with flying glass from lamps or windows. Nina's scream was lost amid other screams.

Afterwards the small girl felt little or nothing.

A curtain of nightmare, now called shock, wrapped soothingly round Nina's mind and nerves. She looked without surprise, or with very little surprise, at anything she saw. Though her mother, also unhurt, still crouched and breathed heavily, Nina stood up on shaky legs.

Most of the black hedge of

tall shiny hats had fallen away. It lay motionless, or tried to crawl across bloodied white sand. And, as Nina turned sideways, she saw the Emperor's state-coach near the foot of the steps.

"Sire! Sire!" she heard military voices shouting, amid other shouts. And, above it, the bellow of a military-policeman: "Sire!"

The great closed carriage was at a standstill. Stabbed with blast and steel-splinters and needles of glass, it had toppled partly towards Nina but remained intact except for its windows. Also, by some miracle, one great gold-bound carriage-lantern was still burning on this side.

Before the officers of the Emperor's bodyguard could reach the handle of the coach-door, the door opened. There emerged a stately-looking man, plump rather than stout, who jumped to the coach-step and thence to the ground.

The carriage-lamp gleamed on gold epaulets against a blue coat, and white trousers. His (apparently) steady hand was just putting back on his head the over-decorated cocked hat he wore fore-and-aft. Nina knew, if only from pictures, that he was the Emperor. Though he might be sallow-faced and growing puffy under the eyes, yet between his heavy black moustaches and fox-brush of imperial beard there appeared the edge of a cool smile.

"He is not hurt, the Emperor! Louis Napoleon is unhurt!"

"Long live the Emperor!"

Gravely the sallow-faced man handed down from the carriage a pretty, bad-tempered lady, her countenance as white as her long pearl earrings; she must be the Empress Eugénie. Officers, their uniform-coats torn and their faces slashed, whipped out sabres in salute.

"Long live the Empress!"

"And the Emperor! And the Emperor!"

A thick, low rattle of drums ran urgently along the line. Foot-soldiers, dark silhouettes, flowed across and stood up at present-arms, so that the Emperor might not see fallen men with half faces or women carrying bomb-splinters where they might have carried children. Round that wrecked carriage, with its two dead horses, lay one hundred and fifty persons, dead or wounded.

The Emperor smiled broadly, concealing agitation.

For the first time genuine hatred, a hatred of what she saw for herself, entered into Nina Bennett and never left her. It made her small body squirm, choking back her voice. It may have been due partly to the teaching of her mother's friends of Young Italy, of the Carbonari, who derisively called Napoleon the Third "the sick par-

rot" when they did not call him devil. But now it was Nina's own hatred.

She could not have explained what had happened, even now. Though she had heard something of bombs, she did not even think of bombs—or of the men who had thrown them. Nina felt only that a white lightning-bolt had struck down beside her, hurting, *hurting* these people and perhaps even making them die as her own father had died a year ago in Naples.

Yet the yellow-faced Emperor, with his black moustache and imperial, had taken no scathe. He stood there and (to Nina) smiled hatefully and hatefully. He had caused this. It was his fault. His!

Instinctively, amid the reek and the drum-beating, Nina cried out in English: the language her father had taught her, and which she spoke far better than French or even Italian.

"Sick parrot!" the small lungs screeched, the words lost. "Devil! Usurper!"

And then her mother enfolded her, feeling over her for wounds and whispering furiously.

"Be silent, my child!" she whispered. "Not another word, I tell thee!"

Gathering up Nina under her fur pelisse, and adding indignity to hysteria, *maman* fought and butted her way out of the crowd with such fury that suspicious eyes turned. Up in front of them loomed a military-policeman, his immense cocked hat worn sideways.

"The child!" cried Signora Bennett, clutching Nina with true stage-effect, and tragically raised dark eyes to a dark muffled sky. "The child," she lied, "is injured!"

"Pass, madame," gruffly. "Regret."

Though the distance was not great, it took them almost an hour in the crowds to reach their fine furnished lodgings in the rue de Rivoli. There waited Aunt Maria, also Italian and *maman's* maid-companion, fiercely twisting the point of a knife into a rosewood table as Aunt Maria awaited news. Afterwards Nina could remember little except a bumping of portmanteaux and a horrible seasickness.

For Signora Bennett, Nina and Aunt Maria left Paris next day. They had long been safe in England when two of the bomb-assassins—Orsini and Pieri—dropped on the plank and looked out through the everlasting window of the guillotine.

II

And that had been just over ten years ago.

So reflected Miss Nina Bennett, at the very mature age of nineteen, on the warm evening early in July, 1868, which was

the third evening after her return to Paris. Nobody could have denied that she was beautiful. But all those years in England had made her even more reserved than the English, with a horror of elaborate gestures like those of her late mother.

Though the sky was still bright over the Place de la Concorde, Nina Bennett had told Aunt Maria to close the heavy striped curtains on the windows. Aunt Maria was very fat now. She had a faint moustache of vertical hairs, like a tiny portcullis between nose and mouth. As she waddled over to scrape shut the curtains, and waddled back to her chair, wrath exuded from her like a bad perfume.

Nina sat at the dressing-table before a mirror edged in gold-leaf. Two gas-jets, one in the wall on either side of the mirror, sent up yellow flames in flattish glass dishes. They shone on Nina's pink-and-white complexion, her dark blue eyes, her bright brown hair parted in the middle and drawn across the ears to a soft, heavy pad along the nape of the neck. The evening gown of that year was cut just an inch and a half below each shoulder, curving down in lace across the breast; and Nina's gown was so dark a red that it seemed black except when the gas-light rippled or flashed.

Yet her intense composure gave Nina's beauty a chilly quality like marble. She sat motionless, unsmiling, her arms stretched out and hands lightly crossed on the dressing-table.

"No," she thought, "I am not unattractive." The thought, or so she imagined, gave her neither pleasure nor displeasure.

At her left on the dressing-table stood a great bouquet of yellow roses in a glass vase of water. Nina Bennett had bought them herself, as a part of her plan of death. In the dressing-table drawer lay the weapon of death.

"I have no heroics," she thought, looking at the reflection of her blue eyes. "I do not think of myself as Joan of Arc or Charlotte Corday. Though I may be insane, I do not believe so. But I will kill this puff-ball Emperor, who still mysteriously reigns over the French. I will kill him. I will kill him. I will kill him."

Her intensity was so great that she breathed faster, and faint color tinged her pink-and-white face. Suddenly, out of the darkling background in the mirror, she saw fat Aunt Maria, with gray-streaked hair and fish-bone moustache, writhing and flapping with anger.

Aunt Maria's hoarse, harsh voice spoke in Italian.

"Now I wonder," sneered Aunt Maria, "why you must close the curtains, and dare not look on the beauty of Paris?"

Nina hesitated before she replied, moistening her lips. Despite her flawless English speech and her tolerable French, she had half-forgotten her mother's Italian and must grope for it.

"You are at liberty," she said, "to wonder what you like."

Again Aunt Maria slapped the chair-arms and writhed, almost in tears. Never in her life could Nina believe that these gesticulations were real, as they were, and not mere theatricalism. Intensely she disliked them.

"Out there," panted Aunt Maria, "is the city of light, the city of pleasure. And who made it so? It was your be-loathed Louis Napoleon and Baron Haussmann, planning their wide boulevards and their lamps and greenery. If we now have the Wood of Boulogne, it is because Louis Napoleon loves trees."

Nina raised her brown eyebrows so slightly that they hardly seemed to move.

"Do you tell *me,*" she asked, "The history of the sick parrot?"

The gas-jets whistled thinly, in a shadowy room with black satin wall-panels figured in gold. With a studied grace Nina Bennett rose from the dressing-table, and turned around. The monstrous crinolines of the past decade had dwindled into smaller, more manageable hoop-skirts which rustled with petticoats at each step. Glints of crimson darted along Nina's dark close-fitting gown.

"Have you forgotten, Maria?" she asked, in a passionately repressed voice. "In these rooms, these very rooms, where we lived ten years ago? How you took a great knife, and stabbed a dozen times into the top of a rosewood table, when you heard Orsini had failed? Can you deny it?"

"Ah, blood of the Madonna!"

"Can you deny it?"

"I was younger; I was foolish!" The harsh voice rose in pleading. "See, now! This Emperor, in his youth, worshipped the memory of his uncle, the war-lord, the first Napoleon. The first Napoleon they exiled—"

"Yes," agreed Nina. "And kings crept out again to feel the sun."

Aunt Maria was galvanized. "That is a noble line; that is a heart-shaking line!"

"It is the late Mrs. Browning's. A trifle. No matter."

"Well! This young man (yes, yes, it is the way of all young men!) was also a republican; a lover of liberty; a member of the Carbonari itself. Once he promised us a united Italy. But he wavered, and more than a few of us tried to kill him. He wavers always; I say it! But has he not done much in these past few years, to redeem his promise? Body of Bacchus! Has he not?"

Though Nina was not tall, she

stood high above Maria in the chair and looked down at her indifferently. Nina's white shoulders rose very slightly in the dark-red gown.

"Ah, God, your mother has taught you well!" cried Aunt Maria. "Too well!" She hesitated. "And yet, when she died six months ago, it did not seem to me that you were much affected."

"I did not weep or tear my hair, if that is what you mean."

"Unnatural! Pah, I spit! What do you care for Italy?"

"A little, perhaps. But I am an American, as was my father before me."

"So I have heard you say."

"And so I mean!" Nina drew a deep breath; the gown seemed to be constricting her heart as well as her flesh. "My father was of what they call New England, in the state of Massachusetts. His money, though my mother sneered, has kept us above poverty all these years." Her tone changed. "Poor Maria! Do the closed curtains stifle you?"

Whereupon Nina, with the same grace in managing her hoop-skirt, went to the left-hand window and threw back the curtains. Then she opened the curtains of the other window.

Outside, to the little wrought-iron balcony above the rue de Rivoli, was fastened a flagstaff at an oblique angle. From it floated the beloved flag, the flag of the Union, the Stars-and-Stripes little more than three years triumphant in bitter civil war.

"Now what patriotism," jeered Aunt Maria, "for a country you have never seen!"

"It is more than that," said Nina, wanting to laugh. "In a sense it protects us. Have you not heard . . .?"

"Speak!"

"This is our Day of Independence, the Fourth of July."

"Mad! Mad! Mad!"

"I think not. His Majesty Napoleon the Third made a futile, stupid attempt to establish an Empire in Mexico. That did not please the States of America." Nina lifted her exquisite hands and dropped them. "But the traditional friendship of France and America has been renewed. This evening, less than an hour from now, your hypocritical Emperor drives in state to the Opera, for a French-American ball, with ceremonies. As his carriage crosses the Place de la Concorde into the rue Royale. . . ."

Aunt Maria heaved her laundry-bag shape up out of the chair. "Blood of the Madonna!" she screamed. "You do not mean this mad-woman's gamble for tonight?"

"Oh, but I do." And for the first time Nina Bennett smiled.

There was a silence, while Nina stood with her back to the

window, with the soft and magical sky-glow competing with these harsh-singing gas-lights. And Nina was uneasy.

She had expected Aunt Maria to stamp, to howl, even possibly to shout from the window for help. But the ageing woman only fell back into the chair, not speaking. Tears flowed out of her eyes, tears running down grotesquely past her nose and the hair-spikes of her moustache. Nina Bennett spoke sharply.

"Come, Aunt Maria. This is ridiculous! Why should you weep?"

"Because you are beautiful," Aunt Maria said simply.

There was a silence.

"Well! I . . . I thank you, Maria. Still!—"

"Oh, your plan is good." Aunt Maria turned her streaming eyes toward the great bouquet of yellow roses on the dressing-table, and the drawer which held the weapon. "No doubt you will go to the guillotine, in bare feet and with a black veil over your head, because to kill the Emperor is an act of parricide. You will have had no life, none! No laughter. No affection. No love of men."

Nina's face had gone white. For some reason she retorted cruelly.

"And your own vast experience of love, dear Maria . . .?"

"That too is ridiculous, eh? Oho, that is comic; yes? This to you!" Aunt Maria made the gesture. "For I have known love more than you think! And the good strong passion, and the heartache too. But *you* will not know it. You are poisoned; your veins are poisoned. If an honest lover bit your arm until the blood flowed, he would die. Ah, behold! You shrink in disgust like a cold Englishwoman!"

"No, good Maria. And Englishwomen are not cold, save perhaps in public. It is as stupid a legend as the legend that they are all fair-haired."

"Listen!" blurted Maria, dabbing at her eyes. "Do you know who poisoned you?"

"If you please, Maria . . . !"

"It was your own mother. Yes! Do you think she knew no man except your father? Body of Venus, she had enough lovers to fill a prison! I startled you? But, because she must dedicate you to her 'cause' of murder, she would turn you against men. How long she spoke to you, when you were thirteen or fourteen, in the accursed great cold house in London! Have I not seen you rush out of the drawing-room, crimson-faced, and your sainted mother laughing secretly?"

"I . . . I have thought of love," Nina said calmly. "I would love well, perhaps, if I did not hate. And now, Maria, it is time to fetch my jewel-box; and set out my hat and cloak."

Aunt Maria paid no attention. There was a wild shining of

inspiration in her eyes, as though at last she had seen some way to turn this inflexible girl from a mad course. But the time was going, the time was going!

"Come, a test!" panted Aunt Maria. "Are you in truth as poisoned as I said?"

"Did you hear my command, Maria?"

"No! Listen! You remember three nights ago, the evening of the first day we came to Paris? How we returned from our walk, and the young man you met in the courtyard? Well, I saw your eyes kindle!" Aunt Maria cackled with mirth. "You an American? You are a Latin of the Latins! And this young man: was he French—or Italian?"

Nina Bennett grew rigid.

"You have strange fancies," she said. "I cannot remember this at all."

But she did remember it. As Nina turned around briefly to look out of the long window, where a faint breeze rippled the vivid colors of the Stars-and-Stripes, that whole brief scene was recreated in every detail.

As the courtesy-aunt said, it had been at about this time on the evening of July second. Aunt Maria had marched beside Nina as they returned from their walk. Even in this modern age, the most emancipated American or English girl would not have gone through such tree-bewitched streets, full of summer's breath and mirrors a-wink in cafés, without a formidable chaperone.

The house in which they had taken furnished lodgings was unlike most of those in the same street. It was of an older day, patterned after a nobleman's *hôtel*. Through a smaller door in high-arched wooden doors, you passed through a cool tunnel smelling of old stone, with the concierge's lodge on the right. Then you emerged into a green courtyard; it had galleries built round on three sides, and stone balustrades carved with faces. An outside staircase led up to each gallery. In the middle of the green scented turf was a dead fountain.

As Aunt Maria creaked up the staircase, Nina followed her. Vaguely Nina had noticed a young man standing a little distance away, smoking a cigar and leaning on a gold-headed stick. But she paid little attention. In both hands, if only for practice's sake, she carried a large bouquet of red roses in which was hidden a small but heavy object, and two fingers of her right hand held the chains of her reticule. Though strung-up and alert, Nina was very tired.

Perhaps that was why the accident happened. When she had gone six steps up behind Aunt Maria, Nina's reticule—a heavy, flower-painted handbag—slipped through her fingers, bounced

down the steps, and landed on the lowermost one.

"Ah, so-and-so!" exclaimed Aunt Maria, and wheeled round her moustache.

There was a flick in the air as the dark-complexioned young man flung away his cigar. He had suffered some injury to his left leg. But, so deft was his use of the stick, that he scarcely seemed to limp when he made haste. In an instant he was at the foot of the staircase.

The cane was laid down. With his left hand he swept off his high, glossy hat, and his right hand scooped up the reticule. His eyes strayed to Nina's ringless left hand.

"If you will permit me, mademoiselle . . .?" he said.

The man, whether French or Italian, had a fine resonant voice, fashioning each French syllable clearly. His dark hair, parted on one side, was so thick that it rose up on the other side of the parting. A heavy moustache followed the line of his delicate upper lip. His sombre dark clothes, though carelessly worn, were of fine quality.

Nina Bennett, who had turned round, looked down the stairs straight into his eyes. Nina, in a dress of dark-purple taffeta and a boat-shaped hat with a flat plume, would have denied coldly that she was a romantic.

"But he is undeniably handsome," she was thinking, "and without oiliness or exaggeration. He has endured great suffering, by the whiteness of his face and the little gray in his hair. And yet his mockery of eye, as though he knew too much of women . . .!"

Abruptly Nina straightened up.

"I thank—" she began coldly; and then the worst happened.

Nina, still holding the bouquet of red roses, either by accident or nervousness jerked her left wrist against the stair-balustrade. The roses seemed to spill apart. Out of their stems leaped a derringer pistol, short of barrel but large of bore. It banged on the step, and clattered down to the lowermost one. Though it was loaded with wad, powder, and heavy ball, it did not explode; there was no percussion-cap on the firing-nipple.

Nina stood rigid with horror, like Aunt Maria. For a moment, in that shadowy green courtyard under the light of a pink sunset, it was as silent as though they stood in the Forest of Marly.

The young man looked strangely at the pistol, and suddenly jumped back as though he feared it might still go off. Then he smiled. After a swift glance at the lodge of the concierge, he dropped the reticule on top of the derringer, concealing it. He picked up both, advanced up the

stairs, and gravely handed the fallen objects to Nina.

"Permit me, mademoiselle, to return your reticule and your—your protection against footpads. If I might suggest . . ."

"I thank you, monsieur. But it is not necessary to suggest."

"Alas, I have already done so," he said, and again looked her in the eyes. His French voice both pointed the double-meaning, yet smilingly robed the words of offense. Pressing the brim of his hat against the black broadcloth over his heart, he bowed slightly. "Until a re-meeting, mademoiselle!"

"Until a re—" said Nina, and stopped. She had not meant to speak at all.

Whirling round her skirts, the roses and pistol and reticule like a mortifying weight in her arms, Nina marched up the stairs after Aunt Maria.

And this was the brief scene which returned in every detail to Nina Bennett, in the dark old room with the gas-jets, during the moment when she looked out of the long window over the rue de Rivoli. She was only to concentrate, and it was gone forever. But she felt the pressure of Aunt Maria's eyes, wet and crafty, boring into her back; and anger rose again.

Turning round, Nina took four steps and stood over Aunt Maria in the chair.

"Why do you remind me of this?" Nina asked.

"Ola, then we *were* smitten!"

"Hardly." The voice was dry. But, then Nina opened her blue eyes wide, Maria shrank back because they were maniacal and terrifying. "Do you imagine that some sordid affair of love would keep me back from the only cause I have for living?"

"This 'cause'!" sneered Aunt Maria. "I tell you, it is a cold warming-pan for a long night, instead of a husband. Away with it! With your looks and your money: body of Bacchus, you might wed any man you chose." Abruptly, amid her tears, the fat woman began to cackle again with laughter. "But not the young Italian of the courtyard, poor Nina! No, no! Not that one!"

"And why not?" demanded Nina.

"Listen, my child. Pay heed to an old conspirator like me! For I have seen them all. I know the ingratiating air, the cringing approach, the mark of the almost-gentleman. How very well I know them."

"How dare you!" Nina amazed herself by crying out. Then she controlled her voice. "You will allow me, please, to pass my own judgment on a gentleman."

"Ola, then we were not smitten! Oh, no!" cackled Aunt Maria. Then her laughter died.

"Shall I tell you what this young man really is?"

"Well?"

"He is what the French call *a mouchard*. A police-spy."

"You lie!" A pause. "In any event," Nina added casually, "it is of no importance. Since you disobey my order to fetch my hat and cloak and jewel-box . . ."

"No, no, I will find them!" said Aunt Maria, and surged up out of the chair.

On creaking slippers she wheezed across to an immense dark wardrobe, beside the door and opposite the windows. Opening one door of the wardrobe, she plucked out a waist-length cape of rich material in stripes of silver and wine-red.

"Well!" snorted Aunt Maria, examining the cape and giving no sign of furious thought. "You will go to kill the Emperor. I have promised not to interfere; good, I keep my promise! But it will be sad for you, hot-blood, when they arrest you—as they will, mark it!—before you have fired the shot."

Nina's gaze had gone to the grandfather clock, near the alcove which housed the big curtained bed. The time: the time was running out. True, she still had many minutes. But there would be a crowd. She must be in place, the exact spot she had chosen, long before the Imperial procession went past.

Now the meaning of Maria's words stabbed into her brain for the first time.

"What did you say, fussbudget?"

"Enough," muttered the fat woman darkly. "I said enough!"

"Come, good Maria. Is this another of your childish tricks to divert me?"

"Childish!" cried Aunt Maria, now in a real temper. "Was I your mother's companion for twenty years, or was I not? Do I know every dog's-tail of plotting, or do I not?"

"Of old and clumsy plotting, yes. But my device . . ."

"Faugh!" snorted Aunt Maria, past patience. "How do you think Louis Napoleon keeps so quiet his bright city, his toy? Ask the Prefect of Police, M. Pietri—yes, I said Pietri, not Pieri—but above all ask M. Lagrange, the chief of the political police! They buy more spies than the sandgrains at Dieppe! By my immortal soul, Lagrange will stir up a riot for the very joy of showing how quickly he can suppress it!"

Aunt Maria shook the cape. With her own version of a haughty shrug, she reached again into the wardrobe and drew out a very wide-brimmed velvet hat of the same dark-red as Nina's gown.

"You don't believe an old woman, eh?" she taunted. "Good! For I have finished with you. But this I swear on the

Cross: you have been betrayed."

"Lies and lies and lies! —Betrayed by whom?"

"Why, by your young man down in the courtyard."

She was going dangerously far, to judge by Nina's eyes and breathing.

"Little stupid!" she continued to taunt. "Did you not observe how he started and jumped, when the pistol fell at his feet? He thought there might be a bullet for *him*. Did you not see how he looked with quickness towards the lodge of the concierge, who was watching? The concierge, who feeds the police with a spoon?"

Now Aunt Maria did not actually believe one word of what she had said about the young man. In fact, three nights ago she had scarcely noticed him except as a possible moustache-twisting sinner of the boulevards. But these ideas foamed into her brain; she could not stop; she must speak faster and faster.

For it seemed to her that there was a hesitation in Nina's eyes . . .

Nina moved slowly to the side of the dressing-table, still looking steadily at the other woman. Gas-light burnished the wings of Nina's soft brown hair. With her left hand she pulled open the drawer of the dressing-table, in which the derringer pistol lay fully loaded, and with a percussion-cap resting under the light pressure of its hammer.

"What do you do?" Aunt Maria screamed out. Then, abruptly glancing at the door and holding up cape and hat as though to call for silence, she added: "Listen!"

Outside the door, the only door in the room, was a drawing-room with a polished hardwood floor unmuffled by any carpet. There was a sound. Both women heard the soft thump of the cane as the visitor slid forward a lame leg; then silence, then again the bump of the cane. Someone was slowly but steadily approaching the bedroom door. Both women knew who it was.

"My God!" thought the staggered Aunt Maria. "He really *is a mouchard* after all!"

A fist, not loudly but firmly and with authority, knocked at the bedroom door.

Aunt Maria, terrified, backed away towards the bed-alcove and held up cape and hat as though they might shield her.

If there had ever been any uncertainty in Nina's face, it was gone now. Her cold movements were swift but unhurried. From the vase she whipped the bouquet of yellow roses, squeezing the water from the stems and wrapping them in heavy tissue-paper from the drawer. Gripping the stems in her left hand, she plucked out the pistol. There was a soft click as she drew back

the hammer. She made an opening in the roses, hiding the derringer so that nothing should catch in the hammer when she snatched it out.

There would still be time to reload, if she must dispose of an intruder first.

"Enter!" Nina calmly called in French. It was the language they spoke afterwards.

Their visitor, the man of the courtyard, came in and closed the door behind him. He was in full evening-dress, partly covered by his ankle-length black cloak, which yet showed his white frilled shirt-front and a carelessly tied stock. In one white-gloved hand he held his hat, in the other his gold-headed stick.

Again Nina noted the delicacy of his white, handsome face, in contrast to the heavy dark hair and moustache. Even his figure was somewhat slight, though well-made.

"For this intrusion," he said in his fine voice, "I deeply apologize to mademoiselle; and understood," bowing towards Aunt Maria, "to madame."

Nina's pink lips went back over fine teeth.

"Your best apology lies behind you." She nodded towards the door.

"Unfortunately, no." The stranger, at leisure, put down his hat and stick on a table at the left of the door. His dark eyes, with that odd life-in-death quality, grew strong with a fierce sincerity, and so did his voice. "For I presume to have an interest in you, mademoiselle."

"Who are you? What do you want?"

The stranger, with his back to the door, seeming to lounge rather than lean, in a devil-may-care swagger which to Nina seemed vaguely familiar.

"Let us say that I am the detective Lecoq, in the admirable police-romances of M. Gaboriau. Lecoq is a real person, remember, as was the character D'Artagnan. Well! I am Lecoq."

Nina breathed a little faster. Her finger tightened round the trigger of the pistol.

"How did you enter by a locked front door?"

"Believe me, I have passed through more difficult doors than that. Stop!" His white-gloved hand went up to forestall her, and he smiled. "Let us suppose (I say merely let us suppose!) that Mademoiselle Nina Bennett had intent to kill the Emperor of the French. I who speak to you, I also live in this house. I can put questions to a concierge."

"Did I not tell you?" screamed Aunt Maria, hiding her face behind the cape and hat.

Neither of them looked at her.

"To my reader of the French journals, the name of your mother is well-known. The nationality of your father," and he

nodded towards the flag outside the window, his nostrils thin and bitter, "you too obviously display. However! If it be your intent to kill the Emperor, where would you go? Assuredly not far from here, or you would have been gone now."

("If you must kill this sly one here," Aunt Maria thought wildly, "kill him now! Shoot!")

"I think," continued the stranger, "you have chosen the corner of the rue Royale and the rue de Rivoli. Every journal in Paris will have told you, with exactness, the route and time of the procession. It is summer; there will be an open carriage, low-built.

"The Emperor, a fact well-known, sits always on the right-hand side facing forward, the Empress on the left.

"How lovely—" His strong voice shook; he checked himself. "How innocent you will look, in your finery and jewels, chattering English and deliberately bad French, on the kerb-stone! The military, even the military-police, will only smile when you walk out slowly towards the slow-moving carriage, and speak English as you offer (is it not so?) the bouquet of roses to the Empress Eugénie of Montijo."

("I was mad, I was mad!" mentally moaned Aunt Maria. "Let him take the damned pistol from her now!")

"Holding the bouquet in your left hand," he went on quietly, "you must lean partly across His Majesty. With your right hand you will take out an old-style single-shot pistol, and fire at the Emperor's head so closely that you cannot miss. Have I, M. Lecoq, correctly deduced your plan?"

Nina Bennett cast a swift glance at the clock.

Time, time, time! A while ago, when she had looked out of the window, far up to the right there had been a red sky over Neuilly beyond the top of the Champs Elysees.

Now the whole sky was tinged with pink amid white and pale blue. It brightened the gas-lights in that black-silk panelled room, which might have been a symbol of espionage since the days of Savary and Napoleon the First.

"Are you the only one," Nina asked levelly, "who knows of this . . . this plan?"

"The only one, mademoiselle."

With a steady hand Nina took the derringer from among the roses, moving aside the yellow bouquet. It is a sober fact that the young man did not even notice it.

"And now," he said in that hypnotic voice, "I must tell you of my interest in you. It is very easy." He straightened up, his face whiter, and clenched his gloved fists. "You are Venus in the body of Diana; you are

Galatea not yet kissed to true life. You are . . . I will not say the most beautiful woman I have ever met; but the most maddening and stimulating." Cynicism showed in his eyes. "And I have known so many women."

"How modest you are!" Nina cried furiously.

"I state a fact. But I tell you one of the reasons, my love, why I will not permit you to go from this room for at least half an hour."

Again Nina started, almost dropping the pistol.

From the street below, and from the open spaces beyond, there were cries and shouts. She heard the confused running of feet, seeming from every direction at once, which can conjure up a Paris crowd in one finger-snap. Very faintly, in the distance, she also heard the slow *clop-clop* of many horses in procession.

According to every newspaper, the procession to the Opera would be headed by the Imperial band. The instruments of the band were clear rather than brassy; already they had begun with the swinging tune, *Partant pour la Syrie,* which was the official song of Napoleon the Third.

Setting out for Syria
Young and brave Dunois . . .

There was still time. Nina Bennett's hand was as steady as a statue's.

"You call yourself a detective, M. Lecoq. But you are only a police-spy. Now stand away from that door!"

"No, my dear," smiled the other, and folded his arms lazily.

"I will count to three . . ."

"Count to five thousand; I would hear your voice. What matter if you kill me? Most people," and his dark eyes seemed to wander out to the boulevards, "think me already dead. Put your hand in mine; let fools flourish pistols or knives."

"One!" said Nina, and thought she meant it.

The *clop-clop* of the procession, though still not loud, was drawing nearer. What sent a shiver through Nina's body was the tune into which the band changed, in honor of the French-American ball at the Opera. There were no words. There were only dreams and memories. Slow, sombre, the great battle-hymn rolled out.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord! He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. . . .

"In a moment," continued the visitor, "I will come and take that pistol from you. It does not become you. But first hear what I have to say." His tone changed,

fiercely, "This political assassination is more than wrong. It changes nothing. It is the act of an idiot. I know! I tell you I know! If I could make you understand . . ."

Abruptly he paused.

He too had heard the music, clear in the hush of evening. His face darkened. Had Aunt Maria been watching, she would have seen in his eyes the same maniacal glitter as in those of Nina Bennett. And he spoke the only words which could have ended his life.

"By God!" he snarled. "You might have been a human being, without your mother and your damned Yankee father!"

Nina pulled the trigger, firing straight for his heart at less than ten feet's distance. The percussion-cap flared into the bang of the explosion, amid heavy smoke. The stranger, flung back against the door, still stood upright and emerged through smoke.

She had missed the heart. But the pistol-ball, smashing ribs on the right of his chest, had torn open his right lung. And Nina knew now that never, never in her life, could she have fired at the Emperor unless he had first uttered some maddening insult, as this stranger had.

"I thank you, my dear," gravely said the stranger, pressing his reddening fingers to his chest, and white-faced at his own choked breathing. "Now be quick! Put that derringer into my hand; and I shall have time to say I did it myself. They are certain to believe me."

Then another realization struck Nina.

"You've been speaking in English!" she cried in that language. "Ever since you said 'damned Yankee.' Are you English?"

"I am an American, my dear," he answered, drawing himself up and swallowing blood.

"And at least no one can call me a police spy. My name," he added casually, "is John Wilkes Booth."

A black cat, a running man and death in chill
Bridgewater Square set the stage for Bulldog Drummond's
lively intervention where Scotland Yard fears to tread

BULLDOG DRUMMOND STEPS IN

By H. C. McNEILE

in the next SAINT

murder in the hills

by . . . T. S. Stribling

Poggioli firmly believed that murder would out. But the White Oak feud was darkly mysterious in a distinctly more frightening way.

THERE REALLY would have been no mystery at all about the Lemly-Darby affair on White Oak, if it could have been viewed in its entirety from within itself. Betty Ann Lemly's excursion from facts did, of course, constitute a momentary complication. But when we understood why a woman of her impeccable character behaved as she did it ceased to be a complication and became very simple and natural.

No, the inexplicable part was —and this forms a fragment of that permanent mystery which envelops us all—why Poggioli and I ever went up on White Oak in the first place.

It was hard physical labor and it offered no criminological riddle such as my friend enjoys. It was, moreover, drab and it threatened us with almost immediate, violent danger. Neither of us enjoys danger. Some folk do, but we don't, period. So it becomes an actual mystery from that point onward.

There will always be two

Ahoy here is another Professor Poggioli story—the fourth in a series of brand new mysteries which T. S. Stribling has been writing for us. And what mysteries they are! Whether you prefer to think of Poggioli as an all-around genius, or merely the most hugely entertaining sleuth ever to triumph amidst the Southland's tangled destinies we predict you'll regard him with awe. And we further predict that your stunned admiration will extend to Mr. Stribling himself, and the amazing virtuosity which has made him both a Pulitzer Prize winning novelist, and a brilliant whodunit writer with an audience enviably wide.

schools of thought concerning its solution—the general American point of view and the Southern hill belief. I am a neutralist in the matter. I will give in detail the exact facts and circumstances which sent Poggioli and me off on our ill-advised investigation and the reader may form his own opinion.

When Deputy Dawson Bobbs paused to watch our croquet game at my home in Lanesburg, he mentioned another Lemly-Darby killing on White Oak. Taylor Lane asked what Lemly had got himself killed, and Bobbs said, "That's the queer part. It wasn't a Lemly. It was another Darby."

Helen Stevens exclaimed incredulously, "Two Darbies in a row!"

And Alma Lane asked, "Won't that make the Darbies mad?"

Taylor Lane spoke directly to his wife, "That's very likely, Alma. The Darbies have resented being murdered by the Lemlies ever since the Civil War." He turned to the deputy. "Mr. Bobbs, *which* Lemly killed *which* Darby?"

"That's what I'm finding out now, Taylor," Bobbs rejoined quietly.

"How do you mean—finding out?" demanded Mrs. Helen Stevens.

"I'm havin' a man telephone down there for me, Miss Helen. All the subscribers on the White Oak party line know my voice and know I'm an officer of the law. So naturally they won't tell me nothin'. That's why I have to get somebody else to do my talkin' for me."

"Why don't you drive over and inquire for yourself?" Mrs. Stevens asked.

"Because nobody on White Oak would drive me back," Bobbs said with a wry grimace.

As Mr. Bobbs patiently explained why the writ of the law did not run on White Oak, a nondescript townsman named Dilsey Ivins paused to watch our game, and spoke privately from one side of his tobacco-stained mouth.

"It was Sam Bragg Lemly killed Fan-You-Well Darby."

"How?" Mr. Bobbs promptly demanded.

"He shot him across the mill pond! He was hid in the old Fisher mill."

"Hmm, I see."

The statement was purely private information, of course, between the two. But Taylor Lane observed that his bank had recently lent Fan-You-Well Darby two hundred and forty-seven dollars to buy a boar.

"The family will pay you," said deputy Bobbs. "They're as honest as the day is long."

"I know, they're all Baptists in good standing," said the banker. "So are the Lemlies for

that matter. I've never dealt with an honester set of people."

Our club stood for a moment in impersonal regret that one honest family should murder another honest family in a feud that made no sense. Then Mrs. Lane exclaimed, "Dr. Poggioli, wouldn't that make a good mystery for you to solve?"

Her husband caught Poggioli's eye and shook his head to make it plain that he did not agree with his spouse. "There's nothing mysterious about a Lemly killing a Darby," he said.

"But Taylor, two in a row?"

"The question, ain't that at all, Miss Alma," put in Dilsey Ivins. "It's what went with Fan-You-Well."

The club turned to the deputy's private detective. "What do you mean, Dilsey?" asked Mrs. Stevens.

"I mean Sam Bragg shot Fan across the mill pond. But when he walked aroun' to make sure he was dead, he just wasn't there. He was gone."

There was a murmur of astonishment from the group.

"What went with him?" Mrs. Stevens asked.

"I don't know," Ivins said. "He tumbled in the mill pond and got drowned, I reckon, besides bein' shot. Nobody has seen him since."

Mrs. Alma Lane returned stubbornly to her theory, "Then you can't deny his disappearance is a mystery worthy of Dr. Poggioli!"

She annoyed me.

"Alma," I said, "a good acceptable mystery should begin with the victim found, and the murderer still unknown. Quite as important, to make a top-rate story the murderer's motive must be in doubt. In this case everything is backwards. We know who killed whom and why. But we can't find the dead man."

"He's in the pond!" affirmed Mrs. Alma.

"How do you know he's in the pond?" I demanded, losing my temper completely.

"Our wondering about it—that's the mystery," she countered, with a shocking contempt for logic. "The answer is, of course, that he's in the pond. Any reader of mystery stories knows you've got to start with something really puzzling, and I think this is well worthy of Dr. Poggioli's best efforts."

I was trying to frame some devastatingly satiric reply that would put her in her place and me in mine—for such is the thinly disguised aim of all satire—when Deputy Bobbs broke in with: "Mr. Poggioli can't go over there and ask questions about Fan-You-Well's murder, Miss Alma, and get back alive."

"There, doesn't that prove it's a mystery?" cried Mrs. Lane triumphantly. She was, of course, confusing gun play with the

mysterious because the two always went together in the movies she had seen. But before I could think of a retort discourteous—not to say insulting—the talk of the croquet club veered away from me.

The question under debate was whether Dr. Poggioli could disguise himself, go down to White Oak and solve the mystery without getting himself killed. If he were as great a detective as everybody claimed—here my insistence that he was no detective at all, but a criminologist was airily brushed aside—if he were really great he could disguise himself as a chicken buyer, a mule trader, a rolling store operator—

To my surprise, and consternation, Poggioli himself interrupted the discussion before it could gather further momentum by stating that if he were choosing a role in which to appear on White Oak Creek and investigate a murder it would be as a colporter. I turned to him in bitter protest. "Poggioli, you're not actually thinking about going?"

He said he didn't know. In fact, he really hadn't thought much about it. That meant, of course, that in his roundabout human way of glossing over an issue he was nine-tenths committed.

I asked him what sort of mystery could he hope to find in White Oak worthy of his attention. He said he hardly knew. He simply felt an impulse to go.

"But Poggioli!" I cried. "You've always cautioned me against acting on impulse. You have stressed the primacy of reason—"

"To tell you the truth," he said, "impulse comes before reason or plans of any sort. We'd be well-advised to heed it more often."

Such a reversal of his customary attitude—and it really was a reversal despite the sophistry he used in defending it—unnerved and dismayed me. I knew I would have to accompany him if he did go, and I certainly did not want to visit White Oak. I was born in Lane County, and I knew these killings went on interminably. Anyone who concerned himself with them fell in the role of an innocent bystander, and I'm putting deliberate stress on the word "fell."

Unhappily the croquet club were greatly pleased and excited over the prospect of our going. Lanesburg offers no greater entertainment to its citizens than some passing murder and its subsequent investigation. If by chance the investigators are also murdered—well, that is simply sauce on their pudding.

I mention this not bitterly or disparagingly but in an honest effort to set forth every motivating factor behind our ill-advised junket.

II

It required about a week for us to secure Bibles from Nashville and make our start. The two women of our club made us neat canvas portmanteaus, so that we could carry our stock on our backs. It put them to considerable extra trouble, but that was the way we felt colporters ought to travel. Helen Stevens made mine, and with Poggioli's folly in mind embroidered on it the encouraging Biblical motto, *Let him who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*

Seven members of the croquet club wedged themselves in Taylor Lane's car and drove us part of the way out to White Oak to save us a discouraging thirty-mile hike in the sun.

When we really got started peddling our Bibles Taylor handed me a road map which he had carefully drawn himself. On it was penciled the names of the different farmers along our route, the location of the old Fisher grist mill where the "murder" had been committed, and so on right down to the Lemly farm which he marked with an X.

He stopped with the farm, of course, because beyond that point we had nothing to gain by distributing Bibles. I put the map in my Bible sack for convenient reference. Then we started walking up lean Stony Creek and our interested and enthusiastic friends turned abruptly around and motored back to Lanesburg.

There is something suggestive of violence in the bleak, severely cut-over Lane county hills with their gaping wounds of red gullies. But no purpose would be served in going into that here.

We encountered our first farmhouse, the Williamses, after a brief, half-mile walk and I checked it off dutifully. A worn, tight-lipped old hill woman with a ten-year-old daughter received us. She didn't know whether or not she could buy a Bible because her men folks were away, and there was no one on hand she could turn to for advice. I asked her if her men folk would object if we gave her one. She was so startled she could only stare at us, and gasp.

"Yes," said Poggioli, "we are going to give you one or sell you one—we don't care which. We're employed by the American Bible Society out of Cincinnati."

Old Mrs. Williams was further taken aback and quite obviously awed. "I kain't refuse a Bible," she murmured. "How much is yore cheapest one?"

"Anything you want to pay," I told her.

"Well, I don't want any Bible an' I don't really want to pay anything. But I kain't take a Bible for nothin'. That bein' the gospel truth I reckon I'll haff to."

And with this statement—which at least showed reverence if not enthusiasm—she went to a bureau, produced a cloth tobacco sack, drew out an ancient dime and handed it to us.

The next farm we stopped at was the Labbeys. Mr. Labbey, a silvery-haired octogenarian, protested that he already had a Bible. But I promptly and ingeniously pointed out that he could buy a small individual Bible and wear it in his breast pocket to stop bullets.

Before he could recover from his surprise I reminded him that the diaries of Confederate soldiers usually make some such reference to Union minie balls being stopped and rendered innocuous by the Testament which they customarily carried in their jackets. How was I to know at that moment that I had hit upon a selling point which would ultimately lead to our undoing?

Mr. Labbey became quite interested, purchased a small but rather thickish Bible for a quarter and thrust it resolutely into his breast pocket.

Our next point on Taylor Lane's map was the old Fisher water mill directly adjacent to the Lemly farm where the "murder" had been committed. It was not running, of course, but that did not surprise me. Few of our pre-Civil War industries have survived a century of change.

I said to Poggioli, "It will be a real pleasure to look over such a picturesque old place for murder clues." I hoped that the irony implicit in the remark would not be lost on him, but it was not anything I could count on.

Poggioli slowed down his walk, studied the mill observantly and finally announced that to move on to the Lemly place would be our next stop.

Now the Lemly farm was exactly the place I didn't want to move on to. I said, "Aren't you going to stop and investigate the scene of the crime more thoroughly?"

He replied that he didn't think there was much to see. Lemly evidently had hidden in the old mill and shot Darby straight across the pond which was heavily grown around with rushes. Careful inspection would take hours.

"But look here," I protested. "The pond is mainly what we came to inspect. If you walk around it several times a brilliant observer like yourself will almost certainly see indications revealing where Darby fell into the water, and quite possibly where his body is now."

"MM-mm . . . ye-es," he acknowledged. "But you know I have a feeling that we ought to go on to the Lemly farm first."

"You have a *what?*"

"A feeling."

I was really amazed. "But, Poggioli, give me one sensible

reason for it!" I protested. "Give it to me now and I'll write it down in my notes. When did you ever do anything before solely on the basis of a 'feeling?' Surely such an attitude is unworthy of you. Such an attitude is the antipodal antithesis of the technique which should be adopted by an experienced criminologist working at the top of his bent. The man in the street proceeds in contrary fashion because he 'feels' it to be the thing most naturally expected of him. That's what keeps him in the street. His emotions dominate him."

Poggioli saw my point as well as I did. But he rationalized his predicament by affirming that the real motive power of all human action was impulse, and that reason was its obsequious servant.

"Take yourself," he said. "The reason you are so determined to stop and investigate this pond is because you're subconsciously afraid to go on to the Lemlys."

"That's ridiculous," I said. "I certainly intend to accompany you."

III

One decrepit touch of modernity had proceeded us up White Oak Creek. It was the neighborhood's party line. It spanned irregular intervals of soggy woodland terrain, sometimes supported by skinny posts, but more frequently taking to the trees.

At the old Fisher mill it ran along the edge of the ruined building, and then ventured off on spindling supports toward the Lemlys. We followed it until two small square windows in the Lemly home scrutinized us from under a clapboard roof.

When I yelled, "Hello," a shaggy brown dog burst out from under the stone steps with the obvious intention of chewing us up. Backing away from the gate which seemed to mark the limit of the dog's protective domain I continued to shout until a man's voice called from the doorway to inquire what we wanted.

Poggioli promptly replied in ringing tones that we were distributing Bibles, and had only the friendliest of intentions.

"We don't want no Bibles hy-ar!" came with sharp insistence.

But a woman's voice overlapped the man's with a curt, "Sam Bragg, what do you mean by sayin' we don't want no Bibles? Ast 'em in!"

The door opened, and the woman herself called out with the desperation of all hill women who own hill dogs, "Bulger! Bulger! Shut up, you triflin' no-account. You-all come right on in. He ain't a-goin' to bite you so long as I'm yellin' at him. Bulger . . . Bulger, you hush up now!"

She yelled at him until we got inside the door, and the uproar dwindled into growls and finally subsided altogether. Our benefactress was a personable, black-haired young woman who might have been a Lane county edition of some famous girl athlete. She had that heroic, "last half-mile" look.

The voice of the unseen man repeated, "Betty Ann, tell 'em we don't want no Bibles!"

"But we *do* want a Bible!" she insisted.

"We got one."

"But we don't never use it!" This typically feminine *non sequitur* left the man in the characteristically masculine position of not quite knowing what to say unless he resorted to profanity. And profanity he was obviously suppressing.

We went on in, Poggioli preceding me by a scant five paces. The man looked like the woman —only more so—and I instantly decided that they were brother and sister.

As we settled our portmanteaux on the floor the man said sharply, "Jest wait a minute before you open them bags. What's in 'em?"

"Bibles," said Poggioli.

"You ought to be ashamed of yoreself, Sam Bragg," said the woman.

"All right, I'll be ashamed. But I'll also be alive."

"You can examine my friend's bag," said Poggioli, "and your sister can look over mine. Both of you can pick out the Bibles you want."

"How did you know she was my sister?" Mr. Lemly demanded, immoderately suspicious again.

"Because she seems so completely used to your way of life. A wife would never get wholly accustomed to it," was Poggioli's sage rejoinder.

Mr. Lemly said, "M-huh, you've got a bold tongue in yore head—even if you ain't got no gun in yore bag."

"It's possible, Mr. Lemly," said Poggioli, "for a Bible to be stronger than a gun."

I had to admire his approach. What a speech and how appropriate it was to the place! A hill preacher couldn't have done any better. Both siblings were patently moved—the man adversely, the woman sympathetically.

"I told you, Sam Bragg," she said, "that the Lord is going to save yore soul. Somehow, someway, He'll do it."

"Well, He ain't done it yet," said Sam Bragg.

"Those smaller Bibles you are handling, Mr. Lemley," said Poggioli, imperturbably, "are made to go into your breast pocket over your heart. Sometimes they are a protection to their wearers."

Miss Betty Ann gasped out, "Oh, I wish . . ." and after a

lacuna finished earnestly, "I wish you'd get one, Sam Bragg an' wear it reg'lar. It not only might keep you alive. It would send yore soul to heaven."

Her feminine twist of keeping her brother alive and sending him to heaven simultaneously intrigued me. I had an impulse to touch up the idea in a light ironic way by adding, "Not only that Miss Lemly. When that Bible saves Sam from a knife blade or a bullet, as the case may be, you will find that the steel has been stopped at exactly the right chapter and verse to expose the guilty man."

Not only did I succumb to the impulse. I laid it on with a heavy and decidedly incautious hand. I did not stop to reflect that a colporter would hardly speak ironically of his own wares. It was both unsalesmanlike and irreverent. It angered both of them, and what was worse, proved to Sam Bragg that we were not colporters at all, but designing detectives on his trail.

He acted promptly. He stepped behind the door, and reappeared instantly with a Winchester. He levelled the weapon ominously, told us exactly what sort of vermin we were and was apparently about to exterminate us when Miss Betty Ann Lemly leaped toward him.

She forced down his barrel and screamed, "Sam Bragg, you high-tempered fool! You shoot before you look every time!" Then she burst out weeping, which was an amazing turn of behavior in a hill woman, especially a Lemly.

"Hush up, Betty Ann! You let that barrel go. I know they are law officers!"

"I know they ain't law officers!" she sobbed, her eyes defiant. "Do you reckon the Lord would send law officers to this house if I ast him for—"

"What are you talkin' about?"

"I'm sayin' they can't be law officers. Did any law officer ever come around here totin' nothin' but Bibles?"

"What are they then?"

I intervened promptly in as steady a voice as I could muster. "We are colporters," I said, "distributing Bibles."

"Well, what did you come here at all for?" demanded Lemly. "Do you think we are heathens?"

"Sam Bragg," cried his sister, "don't ast 'em why they came. They don't know."

He stared at her in amazement, "Betty Ann, have you gone crazy? You've been actin' crazy ever since—" he broke off angrily and returned to his point. "What makes you say these varmints don't know what they come here for?"

"Because they don't. They came in answer to my prayer!"

"What?"

"Yes, they did! I prayed the

Lord to send somebody to soften yore hard murderin' heart, Sam Lemly. When I heard over the phone that some Bible peddlers was on their way, I prayed stronger than ever, Lord, let let them be it! Let them be it!"

"Why did you pray for such fool city fellers as these are? Why, they don't even b'lieve in God!"

"Sam Bragg, I didn't specify nothin' to the Lord. I jest prayed for Him to send along somebody or somethin' to touch yore hard heart. He's bound to know what He's doin'—" She controlled her voice and theorized more stoically. "I had hoped maybe they would sell you a Bible and you would wear it reg'lar, and it would really stop a bullet and convert you to religion. It could work thataway even if this little pole cat made fun of it. But it's all in the Lord's hands. He's got this far an' I know He ain't ever goin' to stop."

"Betty Ann, I had no idyah in the world you was prayin' aginst me."

"I'm not prayin' aginst you. I'm prayin' for you, you hard-hearted man!"

The fact that his sister had been praying for something momentous to come, and we had turned up with two bags of Bibles certainly gave us a supernatural flavor in that hill country setting. It stopped Sam Bragg's idea of an immediate execution. He began interrogating us to see if there was any truth in the "miracle."

What were our names? When we told him he asked the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question. Who were we working for? Betty Ann said, "The Lord." But unfortunately I said at almost the same instant, "The American Bible Society out of Cincinnati."

I wondered if there was actually an A. B. S. in Cincinnati. I knew that a letter would take some days to travel that far and come back unopened. But I should have stuck by Betty Ann's designation of our employer.

"Who runs the American Bible Society in Cincinnati?" asked Sam Bragg belligerently.

"A Mr. Smith," I told him.

"What's his other name?"

"John," I said, feeling somehow incapable of originality.

"What's his *street* address?" demanded Sam Bragg relentlessly.

"I always write him in care of the American Bible Society," I said quickly. "It's a big concern. Everybody knows where it is."

"I'll check on that," promised Mr. Lemly, "and John Smith better run the American Bible Society in Cincinnati."

As I stood moistening my lips and speculating on the possible dire implications of Sam Bragg's check-up, Betty Ann harried him in a sick voice, "Go on Sam

Bragg. Pick out a Bible. When the Lord sends Bibles the least you can do is to select one."

She herself chose a twenty-five-cent testament from Poggioli's bag and went to an old chest in a cobwebbery corner of the room to get the money.

Sam Bragg was still selecting his talisman from among my Bibles when Betty Ann paid Poggioli for her purchase. As he accepted the two dimes and five pennies he asked how long she had been praying for someone to come along and convert her brother.

"Not long, Brother Poggioli," she said, according him the fraternal courtesy title most favored by her church.

"About . . . four days?" Poggioli suggested tentatively.

I was surprised and a little shocked to realize that he had dated her prayers back to the day of the murder.

"Before that, Brother Poggioli," she said, with what seemed to be complete candor.

"I see. Then for some time, Miss Lemly, you have been praying for a peacemaker between your own and the Darby family?"

"Yes, I have, Brother Poggioli," she said, regarding him with puzzled eyes.

I could understand her bewilderment, for I too hadn't the faintest idea what Poggioli was getting at. My alarm increased when it dawned on me that Sam Bragg might easily catch on that my reckless friend was really conducting an examination into the death of Fan-You-Well Darby, and that the instant he did our lives would be in danger again.

Just as I feared, Sam Bragg suddenly grabbed his Winchester for the second time and snarled, "These here dirty dawgs are nothin' but detectives!"

Again he was about to deal out summary justice when Miss Lemly, clutching her new Bible, threw herself in front of him.

"Sam, what's gone wrong with you now?" she demanded, her lips ashen.

"Look at this here road map!" cried Sam Bragg, pulling out the sheet which Taylor Lane had made for us. "Take a good look. It stops with our house marked 'X' an' there's nothin' beyond it. That proves they are detectives come here jest to spy on us." The Winchester made loud disturbing clicks, and the barrel quivered.

"Keep that gun down, Sam Bragg, an' listen to reason!" Miss Lemly pleaded.

"How can you explain this here map stoppin' at us?"

"How can you explain these Bible peddlers didn't stop at the ol' Fisher mill if they was detectives? Did any detective ever fail to stop an' look at the place where you shot a Darby before? You know they didn't! You shoot

before you think Sam Bragg—before you even look!" And Miss Lemly began weeping again.

When I was able to speak I said, "Miss Betty Ann, how did you know we didn't stop at the old Fisher grist mill?"

"We knowed how fast you walked," she said. "The neighbors telephoned us when you passed their houses, so Sam figgered out when you ought to git here if you came straight on. He allowed he was goin' to kill you both if you turned up twenty minutes late.

"So I prayed the Lord for Him not to let you hang around the ol' griss mill which He didn't. An' that ought to prove to Sam, when he stops to think, that you ain't detectives. No detective in the world would fail to stop an' look at the pond where he shot Fan-You-Well."

"Will you stop mentionin' that dirty skunk!" cried her brother.

"He's not a dirty skunk!" Betty Ann exclaimed defiantly.

Sam Bragg's face darkened. "Anybody claimin' such a name as Fan-You-Well is a skunk—and a dirty one."

"You don't know nothin' at all about that, Sam Bragg Lemly. Fan-You-Well was named for his great, great uncle in Boston named Fan-You-Well Hall. Fan-You-Well Hall done something very great back in the Revolution. I don't know what it was, but that old uncle Fan-You-Well wasn't skeered of nobody or nothin' and neither is Fan-You-Well. So he ain't a skunk."

Her proof was feminine and like a bush fire. When Sam Bragg beat it out at one point it instantly spread to another. The question of whether or not we were detectives got lost in the ancestry and character of the Darbies, which was a comforting circumstance as far as it went.

Sam Bragg seemed to be waging a fierce inner struggle with himself concerning his attitude toward us. His final decision was, "Well, you can stay here an' make yoreselves at home until I can check up on yore Mr. John Smith who runs the American Bible Society in Cincinnaty."

Of course his concession was ordinary southern hospitality. But I didn't like the string which he had ungraciously attached to it.

IV

Betty Ann showed us to our room. It was a kind of second-story loft with three windows, and we reached it by climbing a flight of winding stairs encircling the great stone fireplace in the living room.

"I sure prayed hard for you when you passed the mill dam,"

Betty Ann said as we ascended.

"I don't doubt that," said Poggioli. "You must have prayed even harder to get us started on this case."

"I prayed right from the start," said Miss Lemly looking at us gratefully. She followed us into the room and made sure that the windows could be easily opened and closed. Then she said, "Now don't you try to slip out durin' the night. At night Sam Bragg puts up Bulger the watch dawg and turns out three guard dawgs that really will bite."

I assured her we'd remember that.

Then she said, "I'll bring yore supper an' breakfust up to you, if you can stand my cookin."

I assured her that we would be grateful for her kindness in that respect.

When she was gone I turned to Poggioli and asked, "Why did you tell her she must have prayed hard to get us started on this case?"

Poggioli sighed heavily and said, "Why do you think we started?"

He didn't wait for me to reply. He had turned his attention to a dusty pile of old newspapers, and was thumbing through them with an air of repressed excitement. After a moment he walked to one of the windows and stood staring down into the yard below. I was really perturbed. I couldn't very well tell him that his moodiness was getting on my nerves, but I certainly felt like doing so.

The last of daylight had faded from the loft's narrow windows when to my surprise the door opened and there stood Betty Ann with a candle. The candle was set in about the center of the right hand side of a divided tray, while our suppers were in the opposite side.

Later Poggioli pointed that strange fact out to me and I remembered it. But I saw nothing significant about it at the time.

Our suppers were good southern suppers, consisting of fried apples, fried chicken, fried mush, and all the trimmings. In the North such suppers grow stomach ulcers and produce millionaires. But in the South they simply start feuds.

Betty Ann was in the happiest of moods. As she served our suppers she hummed one of those ancient lugubrious hymns with which southern hill folk express joy and satisfaction.

I said to her, "Betty Ann, you're feeling better."

"A lot better, thank you," she replied.

"You needn't have brought our suppers up to us," I said. "We could have come down."

At this she paused, gave me an odd look and said, "Really it's not on yore account so much as it is Sam Bragg's. He's got a

nervous stomick an' has to eat by himself. So I fend for him like this."

I gave the information scarcely a thought, but when our hostess had departed Poggioli said, "That was a dangerous dig you gave Betty Ann."

"What dig?" I asked.

"Your needling her for an explanation of why we were not invited down to supper and her very lame excuse—that her brother was nervous."

"Isn't he nervous?" I asked.

"Of course not," Poggioli assured me.

"Then why doesn't he let us come down to eat?"

"He's not keeping us up here. It's Betty Ann's idea."

"How do you know that, Poggioli?" I demanded. "Betty Ann prayed for us to come here. Why should she object to eating with us?"

Poggioli considered this for a moment. Then he said: "Does it help your thinking for me to point out that Betty Ann brought our suppers in on a divided tray with a candle on the empty half of that very odd kind of serving arrangement and our suppers placed carefully on the other?"

I pondered the point analytically. I could see that Poggioli attached some importance to it but I couldn't for the life of me understand how the arrangement of food on a tray would indicate much of anything. I finally told him so.

"You can't couple that fact with her insistence that we eat up here in the loft, and with the further fact that after almost a century of feuding, Betty Ann has suddenly developed a great religious objection to Sam Bragg's shooting a Darby?"

"That is simple enough," I said. "It is right after Sam has murdered a man."

"You mean it is right after he is *supposed* to have murdered a man."

"Didn't he?" I asked blankly.

"MM-mm. There is the candlestick, occupying half a crowded tray. Add to that the fact that our meals were brought up here in the loft, with Betty Ann determined to keep us up here, and scaring us with tales of watch dogs. I should think that even you would sense something very strange in such a combination of circumstances."

I looked at Poggioli in the gloom. I said to him, "Poggioli your endless investigations of criminals have undermined your belief and trust in ordinary innocent people. Betty Ann Lemly is one of the most guileless and well-meaning young women I've ever met."

V

We finally turned in for the night on the corded bedstead. I lay sensing the cords, and think-

ing how the old pioneers who survived such hardships would naturally become strong and invincible fighting men. But it was a little late for me to start training at my age. I finally fell into a deep sleep.

I was awakened by an elusive, shifting glimmer of light. I bestirred myself, and saw Betty Ann standing in the doorway holding a candle. I thought at first it was breakfast time, for I knew that the Tennessee hill people eat one meal by day and two by night.

I inquired if it was time to get up and to my surprise she asked me if I needed a doctor. I thought to myself, "This really is southern hospitality. Along with a midnight snack, to furnish a doctor." Aloud I said, "Not yet, Betty Ann."

"Does Brother Poggioli need one?" she asked anxiously as if she were determined to furnish us a medical man, and would not be put off.

I saw she was in earnest, and I really was puzzled. "I don't know, Betty Ann," I said. "But I'll wake him up and see."

I was about to do this when Poggioli answered for himself in a completely wide-awake voice,

"Yes, I am quite ill, Betty Ann. I do need a doctor, desperately."

"I'll go right down and telephone him" she said, and started for the breakneck stairs.

"What is the name of the doctor you are sending for, Betty Ann?"

"Squire McKelvey," she said. "He's a jestice of the peace and a doctor, too."

"I wouldn't send for him tonight, Betty Ann," Poggioli advised.

"Yes, but will I be able to git him in an' out in the mornin'?"

"I am sure you will," Poggioli said. "I think I can guarantee it. I don't believe the Lord would have gone this far in His plans only to fall down on them in the end. Do you?"

Betty Ann was touched. "I thank the Lord sent you here, Brother Poggioli. I do thank Him from the bottom of my heart." Whereupon she went back through the door and I thought I heard her weeping again, this time, quite possibly from joy. But I didn't understand a breath of any of this.

I asked Poggioli what he meant by affirming that he was sick. He asked me if I had noticed that Betty wanted to send for *Squire* McKelvey who was in her mind a *justice of the peace* first and a *doctor* second? I italicize the words just as Poggioli did.

"Why, no, I didn't notice it particularly," I told him. "Besides that has nothing to do with the matter. The trouble with you,

Poggioli, is that your vocation in life has made you a complete cynic. You don't believe in anybody's straightforwardness—not even in as good and religious a girl as Betty Ann Lemly."

I am sorry to say my admiration for Betty Ann's goodness and religiousness received a severe shock the following morning. After Poggioli and I had our breakfasts, Poggioli remained "sick-a-bed." But I climbed below and found Sam Bragg eating sorghum and flapjacks. I inquired about his nerves.

"Nerves?" he asked. "What do you mean?"

I told him that Betty Ann had explained to us that we had to eat upstairs because he was too nervous to eat with anybody, upstairs or down.

I have never seen anybody respond to well-meaning sisterly solicitude as ungratefully as Sam Bragg. He jumped up from the table shouting, "Betty Ann! Betty Ann! Where are you, woman!"

When his sister appeared on the back steps that led to the loft, he went on hotly, "What do you mean by tellin' this man I'm too nervous to eat breakfust with him. I'll eat breakfust with the devil if I choose."

"We haven't got no time to go into that," said Betty Ann. Pore Mr. Poggioli is sick and we've got to git Dr. McKelvey up here quick!"

"Dr. McKelvey is a jestice of the peace!"

"I know he's a squire, but he's comin' here as a doctor, not as a arm of the law." And Betty Ann, having talked herself away from the matter of Sam Bragg's nerves, hurried to the wall telephone.

"You can't git nothin' on that thing," cried Sam Bragg, his anger at being called nervous carrying over against the telephone itself. "The line's grounded. Some tree or post or somethin's broke down. I spent half the night tryin' to call Cincinnaty, but I never got nothin' at all!"

"I should think it would work in a case of life and death," said Betty Ann. She hurried to the box, opened it, and fingered around in it to make sure that it was all right at her end. Having done her part, she whizzed the bell handle in an intricate combination of long and short rings that stood for Dr. McKelvey's residence.

Providence did not let her down. Dr. McKelvey had apparently been standing in the hallway of his home waiting for her call. We could hear his voice over the rural telephone quite as plainly as we could hear hers.

"Dr. McKelvey, this is Betty Ann Lemly."

"Yes, I know your voice, Betty Ann."

"We got a terribly sick man

at our place, Dr. McKelvey. Can you come over this mornin'?"

"I can't make it to your place until about noon, Betty Ann, I got a sick boy, a sick hog and a baby case on the way over."

"That's all right. Git here as soon as you can, an' bring everything with you." She rang off to let all the listeners along the line know that she was through.

Sam Bragg was suspicious. "Betty Ann, what do you mean tellin' Doc. to bring everything with him?" he demanded.

"Well, he's got two bags of tools—his surgical bag an' his medical bag. When he comes up on White Oak to see a man he usually just brings his surgical bag. But Mr. Poggioli ain't been in no fight. He's got somethin' terribly *wrong* with him. So I told the doctor to bring his medical bag too."

This sounded smooth and probable enough. It was not until Squire McKelvey arrived at about noon that I discovered that Betty Ann had indulged in pure fabrication. She did not actually mean two medical bags. The statement was a signal she had arranged weeks before with Dr. McKelvey. The telephone had not got out of order.

Betty Ann had taken out a screw or a connection from its interior and caused it not to work in order to keep Sam Bragg from talking with Mr. John Smith, president of the American Bible Society in Cincinnati at night rates and so discovering that Poggioli and I were impostors.

Also her tale of her brother's weak nerves was apocryphal. I realized that after my early morning talk with him. I mention these points only to show that I had begun to suspect Betty Ann myself before Dr. McKelvey reached us at noon, and he and Poggioli gave us a fuller explanation.

The doctor arrived just before the noonday meal and Betty Ann hurried him up to Poggioli at once. I had become uneasy. I was afraid my friend would take it into his head to become sick after I left him, solely through suggestion. I wanted to go up with them, but the doctor sternly forbade me.

"No," he said. "The patient must have rest and quiet. I've doctored city people before who've took down in the country. They have nervous indigestion. They just don't lead the right kind of lives, what with all the immorality that goes on in the cities—"

I assured him Poggioli was neither immoral nor a criminal. The doctor said there were a lot of city people who were honest men. He knew that. But their surroundings made them nervous and caused them to drop dead in early manhood.

Apparently I was part of the surroundings that had made my

friend nervous, so I had to stay downstairs while McKelvey climbed up to administer to him.

I bowed to the doctor's insistence most unwillingly, worried, biting my nails. I told myself that if Poggioli died I would never finish my notes and all my walking and packing Bibles up hill and down dale in the hot sun, my sleeping on a corded bedstead, and my actual physical danger, would be utterly wasted.

Betty Ann made my distress more acute by coming down after a pan and a tea kettle of hot water. She said Poggioli had had a hemorrhage. She made several more trips from the kitchen and living room to the loft, packing all the endless things that doctors fail to bring with them when they make a so-called professional visit.

I asked Betty Ann how Poggioli was getting along and she said the doctor hoped to patch him up in time to get him down to dinner.

"And him with nervous indigestion?" I said.

"Oh, well, of course he won't eat much," said Betty Ann.

It turned out that Dr. McKelvey's hopes were realized. Poggioli really did come down for the noonday meal looking not too much the worse for wear. When we were all gathered around the kitchen table Betty Ann asked Poggioli, as a Bible peddler, to say the blessing.

That made me nervous. Here in the South "the blessing" is not an extemporaneous effort. It is a brief appropriate apophtegm and anybody who "says the blessing" is expected to have one already memorized. If he has no natural gifts in that direction he simply tells his hostess, "I don't say the blessing" and that ordinarily ends the matter.

But if a Bible peddler should appear at a table and not know a blessing his defection in that respect would naturally bring him under suspicion as an impostor. And that is why I became so nervous.

Dr. McKelvey, Sam Bragg and Betty Ann looked down into their plates, waiting for Poggioli to start. I was staring at Poggioli, wondering if he *could* start, when to my dismay he launched out on something that held not the faintest resemblance to a blessing. It was a prayer—and it was history. It was an argument, it was an appeal for peace between the families on White Oak. But it was not a blessing. I expected, every minute, that Sam Bragg would jump up and shoot Poggioli. But he didn't.

Poggioli evidently had secured enough facts from the old Lane County Citizens, and the other newspapers in the loft to ballast him, and as he went on he made

up more than a few additional necessary details. He quoted the dates and names of every murder between the families Lemly and the Darby clear back to Civil War times.

"And Lord, the pity of it all," he intoned. "This whole long tragedy has been based on a century-old misapprehension. The first Lemly to get shot was not shot by a Darby. He was shot by a Yankee bushwhacker who had stolen old man Lem Darby's musket and killed old man Jethro Lemly with it. The bushwhacker robbed the Lemly home and left the Darby gun by the well-house to throw suspicion on the Darbies. That deception started a feud that still goes on. Oh, Lord and Master, we humbly pray you, in the name of peace and justice, to let it end today. Amen."

As he said "Amen," out from the door beside the big fireplace hobbled Fan-You-Well Darby. And with quiet eloquence he told us how he had been shot at the pond and how Betty Ann, who had come to meet him there, had carried him home with her.

Dr. McKelvey began talking rapidly. He said this was as clear a case of providential dispensation as he had ever witnessed. Looking straight at Poggioli he declared that there was not another man with such knowledge of the past within reach of Betty Ann and Fan-You-Well's prayers. Poggioli hadn't known a thing in the world about them. But the Lord had picked him out and brought him here to bring peace between two of the bravest pioneer families that had ever settled in Lane county.

It was a good speech. All southern squires know how to make a good speech—or they wouldn't be re-elected. Fortunately Dr. McKelvey had brought a marriage license along with him. A marriage license was what Betty Ann had been referring to when she had telephoned him to bring "everything." It was a signal for him to arrive with a license, because she had Fan-You-Well where she could lay a hand on him.

Since a justice of the peace is able to perform a marriage ceremony, Squire McKelvey did so amidst a general rejoicing and no violence from her brother.

I read these notes to the wedding party to prove to everybody that Poggioli and I never were detectives.

Dr. McKelvey patted me on the shoulder, and said, "You ain't half as dumb as Betty Ann thinks you are."

As to what really brought me and Poggioli to the Lemly farm —your surmise is as good as mine. The great American public believe one thing about it, the hill people quite another. And so, I have thought at times, does the universe.

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swampland justice

by . . . Joseph Faus

To Dirk murder was a stage play in three acts, with a law-proof final curtain. How could he have foreseen so deadly an epilogue?

DIRK WARNICK stumbled into the clearing, haggard-eyed, reeling, but with a look of relief on his hard face. The hours in the Florida jungle had put a good ten miles between the gaunt scarecrow he had become and danger. He had driven himself to the verge of exhaustion, but he was sure no cop or sheriff could get to him now.

"I'll stay here tonight," he said aloud to himself. "By noon tomorrow I'll be at Gomez Point, and the trapper will sure as hell take me to Cuba."

He had figured it all out to a nicety—in Cuba a new name, a new band and *a different woman.* It listened well.

He looked triumphantly around him. Twilight was settling down but not enough to obscure the small marsh of brakish water covered with cattails, pickerel weed and lily pads, and lined with scrub oaks. Beyond the marsh an expanse of gamma grass sloped back toward the protective wall of the deep Everglades jungle.

A good spot, he decided. *Safe and comfortable.*

Joseph Wood Krutch, whose penetrating essays often touch on the pulsating live nerve of the mysterious in nature has warned us that frogs were probably created to enable us to commune with prehistory, so cold and alien are they. But Joseph Faus has here undertaken to convince us that a frog can be darkly involved in a human drama too, in a hinterland crime terrifyingly chill.

He started suddenly. The deep-throated call was uncomfortably close: *"Br'-wum! Br'-wum!"*

He stared for an instant, then grinned. Dirk didn't like frogs but they were indubitably harmless. He could see the big fellow where it had hopped from the marsh to squat on the grass, its long hind legs sharply drawn up under its bright green body and the bulging black eyes staring up unblinkingly.

"Sure looks like *him!*" Dirk muttered. "Tom, the Frog—that's what they called him."

He realized suddenly that he must get rid of every unnerving link with the past, harmless though such links might be in themselves. He circled stealthily around to the bullfrog's rear and brought his heavy boot down hard, smashing the creature into the grass and the muck. The long legs jerked spasmodically for an instant and the crushed body quivered. Then it lay still with its mouth loosely agape and its black eyes ogling.

"Looks funny!" he grunted, the killer's gleam fading from his eyes.

Dirk dropped on the soft gamma grass and leaned back and laughed. A pistol tumbled from his pocket and rolled down the slope past the dead frog. He regarded the weapon with lazy, amused eyes.

"Stop pointing at me!" he muttered. "Your job's done. I'll take you along to Cuba as a souvenir."

He yawned. The gathering dusk made shadows and weird arabesques of mystery in the glade and across the flat surface of the marsh. Overhead a pale moon and the stars began to show, casting an eerie, silver-toned radiance over the scene.

"Looks different now!" Dirk sat up, strangely intrigued. "Take the marsh there. It looks like a big black stage and that line of oaks is the curtain. Me, I got an artistic imagination!"

Fireflies began to flit along the edge of the marsh, their tiny body lanterns flashing white, yellow and red.

"Footlights! Maybe we're going to have a play! Yeah, that's it. We even got an orchestra tuning up down there in the pit!"

From the sunken edge of the marsh came the thin screechy *"mr-r-r-r"* of the common toad, like the tuning of a violin, followed by the melodious *"gul, gul, guggle"* of a tree frog, a sound akin to the rich notes of a trombone. It was accompanied by the *"chock-chock"* of the green frog that resembled the soft plunk of a treble piano key, and the *"br'-wum! br'-wum!"* of the bullfrog that was the heavy *"boom! boom!"* of the big bass drum. Together they played a wild overture that filled the silver night, then echoed and died away

over the Glades, leaving a silence that was tense and expectant.

Dirk nodded to himself. "Act One—curtain going up!"

He began putting ideas together. The time: winter, some three months ago. The place: Coosha Cafe, on the riverfront in New Orleans. The characters: Dirk Warnick, the girl Gertie, and the man they called Tom the Frog.

Gertie had been *his* girl. He had picked her up from a broken-down tab show and made her soloist of his hillbilly band. He'd built this band up, learning about music and money and women as he went along. The band wasn't Acuff class, but it had ten instruments and booked enough time over the clip-joint circuit to keep him in cakes. He was getting along swell, and Gertie was a real star and catching on fast—after a few tongue-lashings he'd had to give her—when the Frog leaped into the middle of everything.

The first time he had seen Tom, the man was dressed in a loud green suit. He was a funny little guy with a short fat body and long bowlegs; and when he sprang past Dirk and crouched over the big bass drum he looked like a green frog on a white toadstool!

"How 'bout a drummer, sweet an' hot?" he demanded.

He grinned with a wide mouth and looked up out of his black bulging eyes, and then he gave the drum a fancy roll that brought the goose-pimples out and the customers up. He was just as good, too, on the snare and trap, and he could sub on the jug.

The upshot of it was that Dirk hired him, and things boomed merrily along until one afternoon Dirk came early to rehearsal—and found Gertie cuddled in the Frog's lap.

They jumped up when they heard Dirk's step.

"I love Tom," Gertie said, trembly and scared. "And he says—"

Dirk faced the other man, his face livid with rage. "You leave my property alone!" he warned.

His fist caught the man off balance and the Frog went down. He got up slowly and stood on his bowed legs, in a kind of half-crouch, as though he were about to spring. But he didn't leap at Dirk. He merely opened his big mouth, as if to curse him bitterly, but no words came out. Finally he turned and slipped away, ghostlike.

The little man's silence bothered Dirk. He would have known how to deal with threats, but the Frog had acted like a crooked gambler with an ace up his sleeve. Dirk stood watching, puzzled and furious.

And the curtain came down on Act One.

Coming out of his reverie,

Dirk directed a sullen look at the dead frog on the grass. Its legs were beginning to stiffen and they were stretched out in a grotesque manner. The mouth was still open in a puckish grin and the bulging eyes had a leering look in them. The fireflies darted back and forth in the distance and a new burst of music came from the pit: *"Br'-wum! Gul, guggle! Chock-chock!"* Then it stopped as if there'd been a signal.

Act Two. Time, a month later. Place, Medina Casino in Havana. Characters, the same.

All the cute señoritas in Cuba couldn't seem to get Tom's mind off Gertie. Dirk came in one afternoon from an hour at Sloppy Joe's place and found the two behaving like young honeymooners in a dim corner of the Casino.

"This makes twice!" he growled. "Frog, if I catch you with my girl again, you'll sure as hell croak!"

"That's not very amusing," the Frog said quietly.

Gertie stood up, her eyes defiant. "I'm not your girl," she said between tight lips. "Tom and I just got married, legal and honest."

So that was it! The deceit they had practiced on him was the ace up the drummer's sleeve! This time it was Dirk who started to say something. But the words wouldn't come. He stood there in tight-lipped silence for one terrible moment. Then he turned on his heel and went out to the street and into the first pawnshop he saw. He bought a German Luger pistol.

"I'm going frog hunting," he told the dealer.

And that was the end of Act Two, with the curtain going down on Dirk standing in the center of the stage with the loaded gun in his hand and glaring at the Frog and the girl as they walked along with eyes only for each other.

Dirk mentally took himself out of the play and looked down resentfully at the lifeless frog. The frog looked back at him with bright secretive eyes, its big mouth open in a grin which seemed to whisper: "What you said about his croaking wasn't in the least amusing."

"Yeah?" Dirk growled. "A gag, was it?"

The night became quiet again. Time for the final curtain!

Act Three. Time, two weeks later. Place, a strip-tease dump on Juke Joint Row near Miami.

Dirk's band and the strippers were a blind for a bookie and dice layout, but he didn't mind that. Late one night—just the night before last—Gertie had asked him to come to the office. There were some things she did not know, didn't even suspect. He had sold the band on the q. t., cached the dough in Cuba,

contacted the trapper, and had a car waiting.

Now, patting the lump in his pocket, he walked quietly into the office where the Frog was keeping Gertie from being lonesome. He was careful to lock the door after he came in.

Outside, the hicks and the drunks were shouting, "Take it off! Take it off!" and the band was raising the roof with its noise. And that, of course, was all to the good. A little commotion in the office would never be heard.

Gertie faced him, looking for the first time completely proud and unafraid. "Tom and I have had as much as we can stand of this cheap, vicious racket. We're quitting."

"Yeah?" Dirk glared at the Frog. "You stole my girl—now you want to ruin my band! Well, don't say I didn't warn you!"

He leveled the Luger and squeezed the trigger.

The Frog crumbled, a gleaming redness welling out over his green coat. He sprawled to the floor, his long bowed legs stretched out stiff in back of his short fat body, the beady eyes looking up without seeing anything and the big mouth open. Dirk grabbed Gertie and tied and gagged her. All he had to do now was to get away fast.

He swung toward the door, but something made him look back. The Frog hadn't moved. He couldn't, for he was dead—just as dead as the frog on the gamma grass of the marsh. But there was a queer look on his face, as if he were smiling. As if he were saying, "Murder has a way of catching up with people, chum."

And that was silly. For the Frog was stone cold dead and this was the end of Act Three. The end of Act Three is the end of the play, as everybody knows.

He was back in the clearing again. Moistening his dry lips with his tongue, he looked down at the marsh frog. Its big mouth was twisted in a mocking grin, disturbingly like the smile of the dead man in the office at Juke Joint Row. Cursing, Dirk got up and kicked the lifeless creature down the slope.

His gun was down there somewhere. He must remember to get it before he started for Cuba and a new life. It had all worked out neatly. He had slipped out of the office window, climbed into his car, crossed the Tamiami Trail near Ochopee, hid the car, and made his way through the jungle. Tomorrow he'd be secure in Havana, and in a month at the most he'd have a new band and a different woman. The sensible thing now was to get some sleep.

He slouched back on the grass and closed his weary eyes. But sleep would not come. He stirred uneasily and looked around. What the devil was the matter

with him? The marsh had suddenly become silent again, as if there was another act coming up, as if the whole damned jungle was holding its breath and waiting. Waiting for what? The play was over! Did the poor fools think that the dead Frog could get up off the office floor and shoot back? Did they honestly think that?

"Ha—"

The laugh was cut short by a sharp explosion. As if this sudden sound—it was the report of a gun—had signaled the climax of the play, the musical noises from the marsh grew louder. The frog notes rose higher and higher in the silvery theater and throbbed down the avenues of the jungle—until they faded to silence. Immediately thereafter the fireflies turned out the footlights and went home to bed.

THE JUNGLE was as silent as a tomb when the two wildcat hunters stumbled on a motionless form by the marsh in the clearing.

"He's dead," one of them said. "I thought for a minute he was not, because the body is still warm. Now, who could have shot him?"

"Look here!" his companion called.

Ten feet down the slope was the body of a frog, resting against a pistol which pointed up the slope. One of the frog's long bowed legs, projecting stiffly, was caught on the curve of the weapon's trigger.

"I don't know how the gun and the frog got there," the second hunter said. "But I do know how the gun was fired. As you can see, the gun is firmly wedged in place and the frog's leg is firm against the trigger. Many a time I've seen the leg of a frog that had been dead for an hour or so suddenly constrict in rigor mortis. Yes, sir. The dead frog pulled the trigger and shot the man!"

The famed, invincibly feminine Susan Dare scores a thrilling mystery triumph, as murder rears its hypnotic head, and pearls beyond price vanish like a thief in the night

THE CASE OF THE CALICO CAT

By MIGNON G. EBERHART

in the next SAINT

private war

by . . . Cleve F. Adams

McCloud didn't much like the taunt that dead men followed him around. So he took pains to prove he was a cop with integrity.

THE DARK glasses might have fooled Steve McCloud but Mrs. Sherry Cecil's voice never. He'd heard it too many times, dreamed of it too many nights. It was the kind of voice that got under a guy's skin. Singing, laughing—or with a sob in it, the way McCloud had heard it last—it was a swell voice and went with the girl that owned it.

He was standing at the gun rack in Kent and Nichols' examining a new sporting rifle when she came in. It was pretty dark in the corner on account of the rain outside and they hadn't turned all the lights on yet. She went right by McCloud without seeing him and stood at one of the hardware counters, tapping nervously on the glass.

She had on galoshes and a tweed coat, and her little felt hat was tugged far down on her head so that you couldn't see much of her face except what showed below the dark cheaters. Her breast moved under the tight-buttoned coat as if she'd been running. All this McCloud took in with evident enjoyment.

A clerk in shirt sleeves came

We've met several writers of the so-called "hard-boiled" school, and have found them to be quiet, soft-spoken celebrities who could safely be trusted with a big forty-five even in an editor's office. But after reading this Cleve F. Adams' yarn we became just a trifle uneasy. Having never met Mr. Adams we can only say that we liked it immensely, and we think you will too!

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up from the rear of the store and pulled a ceiling light-switch. "May I help you, Miss?" he asked.

"I—I want a file, please."

The clerk looked mildly surprised. "A file?"

"Yes. Something that will cut steel quickly, please."

The clerk swung a series of hinged sample boards, came to the file layout and waited, very bored, for the girl to take her choice.

McCloud didn't move till it became quite evident that she didn't know one file from another. It wasn't that he didn't want to see her. It was just that she'd made it quite plain after the trial that she didn't want to see him, or, for that matter, anybody else who had known her. So he waited, and the clerk fidgeted, and the girl seemed to have an awfully hard time explaining what she wanted to file, and McCloud finally came along the aisle and stood looking down at the top of her head.

"Hello, Sherry," he said.

She didn't turn. "I'll—I'll take that one," she told the clerk, pointing.

McCloud took her elbow, and swung her about. His other hand went under her chin, tilting her head back. "Sun glasses on a rainy day are kind of screwy, even to a dick," he said. His voice was very gentle for a big man, though. "You wouldn't cut an old friend, would you, Sherry?"

Her fine mouth quivered a little, and something that might have been a tear, or maybe a rain drop, crept out from under the shell-rims. "Stephen!" she said, trying to put a lot of pleased surprise into it. "Stephen, how nice!"

He grunted, dug down in his left-hand trousers pocket and paid the man for the file. "See you home, Sherry?"

"No," she said. "Oh, no thanks. As a matter of fact, I'm not going home. But do look me up soon, will you, Stephen?"

Still holding her elbow he steered her up the aisle. "You mean that, Sherry? You're not sore because I put the heat on George?"

She said she wasn't.

"Well, that's swell, then. But where'll I look? You're not at the Preston any more."

"No, I'm not at the Preston any more. I—I couldn't stand the publicity, Stephen. I'm at the Crillon now."

They stood on the walk under the awning for a moment and he saw that she had a cab waiting. He put her in it, gave her the paper-wrapped file. "Tomorrow too soon, Sherry?"

She gave him a tight little smile. "Tomorrow will be just right," she said, and then the door slammed and McCloud was standing alone in the rain, not

minding it a bit because his foolish Irish heart was singing an echo to the promise in her voice.

Of course she'd married the wrong guy. But by this time she knew that as well as McCloud did, for the guy was right this minute on his way up to San Quentin to do a twenty-to-life stretch. McCloud sighed luxuriously and walked down to the Grotto, intending to get a steak and a pint of ale.

A pleasant place, the Grotto. In the windows as you went in, there were lobsters and one thing and another, and while McCloud never ate fish himself he thought it was a swell idea. As usual at six in the evening there was a crowd—mostly the gang from around the Court House and the Hall of Justice. Dicks, shysters, bail bond runners and a jurist or two. Everybody knew McCloud and there was always a seat waiting for him. No matter what the hour, always a seat—because Joe De Luca liked him.

Tonight people acted sort of funny, though. It was as if McCloud's entrance was a signal for absolute quiet. Knives and forks hovered in mid-air, and guys that knew McCloud well just stared at him blankly and looked hastily away. It only lasted a second, and then the din was resumed and everything looked the same as usual. But Steve happened to be sensitive to things like that.

He paused at the cigar stand, leaning his elbows on it, and grinned at Joe De Luca. "What is this—a rib, Joey?" he asked.

Joey said it wasn't a rib, and shoved a folded extra across the glass. He was a little man, very fastidious about his dress and immensely proud of his teeth. The teeth were unbelievably white under the tiny waxed mustache, but De Luca wasn't smiling. He said, "Where you been the last coupla hours, Lieutenant?" And tapped a shiny-nailed forefinger on the paper.

McCloud looked down. It took about two seconds for the news to penetrate, but when it finally did his stomach tied itself in a knot. He wasn't scared. He was just stunned, because he'd planned big things after meeting Sherry Cecil. Now he knew those things could never happen because he knew why she'd been buying that file.

George Cecil, Sherry's husband, wasn't on his way up to Quentin after all. He was in circulation again and when last seen had been sporting a pair of steel bracelets. It didn't take a genius to figure out what the file had been for. He'd had help getting off the train, and one of the two dicks guarding him was now dead. McCloud felt partly responsible for that, because he hadn't gone himself.

Joe De Luca was saying, "Well, I hope you see him first, fella," and McCloud remember-

ed that George Cecil had sworn to get him—*when* and *if*. So that was what was biting all these mugs. They liked McCloud, but they were betting on George Cecil.

He said, "Yeah, well, thanks, Joey," and took the paper with him as he went down the right hand line of booths.

Guys nodded to him now, and said, "Hiyuh, McCloud," and he nodded back, a trifle absently, because all the time he was thinking about Sherry Cecil and her swell voice, and about a file and a pair of steel cuffs on a killer's wrists.

He decided he wouldn't have the steak. He'd lost his appetite, and, anyway, the skipper would think it was funny for a guy to be eating steak when he ought to be out on the pavement looking for a lead. He had a couple of quick ones at the cocktail bar, and was just turning away when somebody laid a hand on his shoulder.

It was the skipper, Captain of Detectives Rex Kilgannon. He said, "Run over to Headquarters with me, Steve. We've hauled in Farmer French and a couple of his rods. Maybe we can get something out of them."

McCloud said, "All right," in a matter-of-fact voice and followed Kilgannon back up the aisle and out between the glass cases of fish and lobsters and what have you. There was one lobster that looked big enough to be the twin of the thing that was slowly tearing McCloud's heart to pieces. Not that even Kilgannon knew there was anything wrong. McCloud's worry, if any of it showed, would be put down to the natural feeling of one dick over another's death —and maybe just a touch of jitters on account of George Cecil's threat. There weren't a lot of people who knew what Sherry Cecil meant to big Steve McCloud.

They cut diagonally across upper Broadway, walking because it was just a step or two, and the water in the gutters, plunging down the hill from the Temple, gurgled and razzed McCloud for being a sucker. It kept asking him questions, like why didn't he call the Crillon or, better still, take a squad and go down and put the collar on George and Sherry Cecil?

He could have said it was because they wouldn't be at the Crillon; not after Sherry had told him the Crillon, anyway. Only he knew that if he was on the level he'd make the try. There was a cop dead and he wasn't doing anything about it. Hell of a note.

Kilgannon's short, thick legs were hard put to it to keep up with McCloud's sudden burst of speed. He panted, "Hey, lug, there isn't any fire!"

McCloud slogged on, not say-

ing anything, just thinking. They got into the Hall of Justice and took the elevator up to the seventh.

Kilgannon's office looked like a convention hall. There were three or four dicks, and Kilgannon's assistant, Jake Kleinschmidt, and the night skipper of the uniformed squad, and a civil clerk, all ready to take down anything Farmer French and his hoods might care to divulge.

French had sent out for a bottle and a swell time was being had by all. On the surface. The cops were playing nice and pretending that one of them being gunned out was all in the day's work, and French was sympathetic as hell about the whole business.

He was a square chunk of a man who liked to pretend he was just one of the boys and deliberately cultivated a manner that went with the "Farmer" tag someone had pinned on him. He had thick gray-black hair and brown skin, which he'd probably gotten from a sun-lamp, and twinkling good-humored dark eyes under a thatch of gray-black brow.

His voice boomed at McCloud. "So the heat's on, eh, boy?"

McCloud shrugged, took off his hat and shook the rain from it. His hair was thinnish, brushed carefully back from a center part and so light it looked almost white under the lamps. He had sort of grayish-green eyes and a healthy, well-conditioned pink skin that made him look younger than he really was. He sat down beside the skipper's désk, put his hat back on and thrust his white, capable hands into his topcoat pockets. He didn't say anything and Kilgannon coughed nervously.

"Well, uhh, we can't hold French forever, Steve. You got any questions you want to ask him?"

McCloud said, "Sure, but will he answer 'em?"

Farmer French laughed boomingly. "Now, now, McCloud, you ought to know me better than that. Haven't I always cooperated?"

"If you mean coming down here whenever you're asked, sure. If you mean spilling anything after you get here, no. Not that I blame you, Farmer. If I was in the rackets I wouldn't talk either. Only thing is, you became Number One when George Cecil took the rap. Looks like it'd be as unhealthy for you as for me to have him running around loose again."

French nodded his big square head at the room. "Just what I've been telling the boys, McCloud. I wouldn't pretend with smart guys like you that there isn't money being made in this country. George always treated me okay, too. But just the same the organizations have run a lot

smoother since you put the bee on him. Everybody satisfied and no squawks. Why should I want George out again?"

Jake Kleinschmidt held his thumb and forefinger to his nose. "Organizations, bah! Rackets is what I call 'em and rackets is what they are. And we let these guys come in here and walk right out again."

Jake had a brother in the produce business, and the brother was paying off, and Jake, even as a lieutenant of dicks, couldn't do anything about it, which naturally made him very sore.

McCloud forgot about his own troubles long enough to grin at Jake's red, perspiring face.

The grin went away when he looked back at Farmer French. "Okay. It's a swell yarn the way you tell it, but there's plenty angles. George Cecil couldn't appear as the number one guy again. Not with the heat on him. Still and all, there's lots of guys in your organization that liked him. Maybe you *had* to spring him to please the boys." He watched the two rodmen as he said this, but he couldn't tell anything from their expressions because they didn't have any.

French's face lost its jovial look, turned wooden. "All right, McCloud, you don't like me and I admit that goes double. Just the same, I don't like the idea of George Cecil being out any more than you do. Besides, I've got an alibi and so has every one of my boys." He broke off as the door opened.

Herman Schwartz came in. Schwartz was French's attorney and had been George Cecil's attorney. He was a dapper little man with black shoe-button eyes and a birdlike maner. He cocked his narrow head on one side, and regarded French quizzically.

"I heard you were down here," he said. "Any trouble?"

"Not a bit," French boomed. "Not a bit, Herman." He looked around the room, chuckled. "The boys and me never have any trouble, do we boys?"

The boys all shuffled their feet and admitted they never had any trouble. All but Steve McCloud and Jake Kleinschmidt. McCloud never shuffled his feet at any time, seldom expressed any kind of emotion. He just looked mildly speculative while Jake chewed his nails in an excess of frustrated rage. It was these two that French didn't like.

Schwartz scratched his nose, said, "Well, then, we might as well be going, eh, Farmer? I've got something I wanted to talk over with you."

French and his two rodmen started toward the door and Captain Kilgannon said "Now, wait a minute, wait a minute. I've got a couple men out I haven't heard from yet."

"Checking my alibi?" French asked.

Kilgannon scowled. The phone on his desk rang and he yanked it to his chest. "Hunh? Oh, all right, you can come in." He put the phone down and waved French away. The Farmer and Schwartz and the two rodmen went out, arguing amiably over who was going to win the fight at the Hollywood Legion Friday.

Captain Kilgannon looked disgusted, and Jake Kleinschmidt said in a choked voice, "You ought to! Every time that mug comes in here I wonder why I ever let him get out again. Well, why do I?"

Kilgannon said wearily, "I don't know, Jake. I don't even know why you keep asking crazy questions like that. There's nothing I'd like better than to— Oh, hell, what's the use talking about it?" He pulled a heaped-up report basket to him, snapped: "Well, what are you guys waiting for? Get out on the street. Find this mug Cecil and it won't hurt my feelings a bit if you don't bring him in alive!"

Turning to McCloud, he said: "You need any help, Steve?"

McCloud said he didn't. He went out with the rest of them and read the paper on the way down to the street. They'd yanked George Cecil off the train at San Fernando. One eye-witness said there'd been two cars filled with gangsters; another said there were two men in a sedan. The dick who was still alive didn't know whether the guys had come in a plane or a steamship. They'd just appeared all of a sudden, and there were a lot of shots and the next he knew he was all over blood, and Fogel, his partner, was dead.

McCloud kept saying this to himself, sort of like a ritual. "Fogel is dead, Fogel is dead. A square guy and I know where the mug is that killed him, or anyway, that is responsible, and what am I going to do about it?" He looked a little tired around the eyes. But still he kept saying it, over and over.

II

McCloud went down the ramp from the main floor and got his own car out of the police garage. It was still raining as he turned down Broadway and the flasher-lighted marquees of the theaters and neon facades of the cafés were reflected in the oily black asphalt. The tires on the car ahead of him squeezed little geysers out of the car tracks.

After a while he turned right and crossed over to Figueroa and then into Wilshire, and five minutes along Wilshire brought him to the Crillon. He parked and went into the ornate lobby, asked the man at the desk for Sherry Cecil's number. There wasn't any Sherry Cecil, the man said. McCloud pulled his badge from a

trousers pocket and described Sherry very minutely.

He could do this, he found, without even closing his eyes. Funny thing, the way some people made an impression on you. There still wasn't any Sherry Cecil, though, not even under another name. McCloud believed the clerk because the Crillon was that kind of a place, and anyway he'd been almost certain before that Sherry had lied. He just wanted to be sure.

He wedged himself into one of the row of phone booths and dialed the Yellow Cab main office. Having put Sherry into a cab he naturally remembered the cab's number. McCloud was like that. It didn't take such a lot of brains to do what he was doing. Determination, maybe, but not brains. After a while they located the driver for him and McCloud got an address on West First Street. He went out there.

It was a kind of down-at-the-heel neighborhood. In the good old days the city fathers and the big-shot pioneers had lived along here because it wasn't so far from the Plaza—just far enough out to get away from the screech of stage-coach wheel and the dust of milling horses. A lot of old houses with their bulging windows and jigsaw cornices were still standing. Some of them had hopeless looking cards stuck in lace-curtained windows offering rooms for rent.

Number 812 was like that, only it didn't have any card. It stared wide-eyed and blank-faced at McCloud as he rolled by. There were lights in the back of the house, though.

He parked, came back on foot and mounted tall steps to the sagging porch. The bell still worked. He could hear it 'way off somewhere when he leaned on the button. He took his gun out of the shoulder holster and put it in his topcoat pocket.

There was a brief wait, then a light went on in the front hall and the diamond-cut colored panes in the big front door made a sort of rainbow effect around Sherry Cecil inside. She opened the door.

McCloud took his gun out and said, heavily, but as if his mind was made up and he wouldn't brook any argument: "I've come for George, Sherry."

Down the hall, back where it was very dim, a guy said, "Get out of the way, Sherry. I'm looking for him, too." That was one thing about George Cecil: he wasn't a rat.

Sherry just stood there for a second, eyes fixed on McCloud with a blank expression as if she wasn't really seeing him. One small hand started up to her mouth, but she let it drop before it reached there. Not the hysterical kind, Sherry.

There was a cough, a dragging footstep down the hall, and Mc-

Cloud got a brief flash of a vague shadow and the bright gleam of metal. He pushed the door wide, flinging Sherry back with it, and lifted his gun.

She screamed then, not loudly: "No, McCloud! No, Stephen, please. He's wounded!"

And like an echo came a flat report. Something lifted McCloud's hat off, and part of his scalp too, it felt like. Blood ran down into his eyes and he brushed at it impatiently. He tried to sight his gun, but he couldn't seem to lift it, it was so heavy. And then there was another shot and the slug must have hit his gun, because it suddenly slammed back against his heart, knocking all the breath out of him. He sat down, not out, but very near to it, and the light in the ceiling looked miles away and was doing tricks that no light had any business to do. There weren't any more shots.

He got an arm up finally and wiped a sleeve across his eyes. His wind came back with a great sucking *whooosh,* and then Sherry, who had mysteriously vanished, came flying back and was down on her knees, cradling his head in her lap. "Stephen! Oh, Stephen, darling, are you hurt badly?"

It was very pleasant to have a girl with a voice like that calling you darling, but a guy couldn't stay on the floor forever. He rolled over and got up, pretending he hadn't heard what she'd called him. Dames sometimes said things they didn't mean, and anyway there was the little matter of George Cecil down the hall.

McCloud shook his big head, to clear it of the buzzing noises, and Sherry put a hand under his elbow, steadying him. He still had his gun. He pushed it out in front of him, started along the hall.

Sherry clung to him. "Stephen, don't you understand?" she said. "George is dead!"

She was crying now, not noisily, and McCloud, somehow feeling that it was all his fault, put an arm around her and they went toward the still huddle back there in the shadows.

George Cecil was dead, all right. Nobody would ever be any deader. He didn't have any shirt on, and there was a whole slew of bandage wrapped around his chest. Blood stained it from beneath and there had been a hemorrhage recently because a lot of the blood had come out of his mouth, too.

McCloud pushed the girl away, turning her around, so she wouldn't have to look, and got down on his knees beside all that was left of the great George Cecil. He'd been a handsome guy, George, and not a rat, even if he had been in a ratty business. Funny about this shooting. McCloud knew he hadn't done it.

So who had? The cops on the train? Nope, the paper had said they hadn't fired a shot.

He got up presently, knowing that whoever had fired the slugs, it was Cecil himself who had caused his own immediate death by getting out of bed to gun McCloud. The exertion had done it. Out in the street a siren wailed. McCloud looked at Sherry there against the wall, telling himself swiftly that maybe he could keep her out of this. He fumbled the key to his flat out of a trousers pocket, thrust it in her hand.

"Beat it, Sherry," he told her. "The cops'll be here in just a second, now, and I'm going to try to keep you in the clear. Go to my flat—you know where it is—and I'll see you there later." He took her shoulders in his two hands, and gripped down hard. "But no more runarounds, see? If I have to go looking for you again I won't be playing. My car's down the street. Scram."

The siren was very close now. McCloud went to the door with her, cursed as he saw the two cops tumbling from the prowl car in front. He knew they'd seen her but sent her on down the steps anyway.

One of the men said, "Now wait a minute, sister. Not so fast. What goes on here?" He grabbed Sherry by the elbow, spun her around and then he looked up and saw McCloud. "Oh, it's you, Lieutenant! We got a call that there'd been a shooting."

McCloud said, "There has. Let the lady go and come on up."

There were a few people in the street now. This part of town was apparently accustomed to minding its own business when the cops were involved. The cop let go of Sherry's arm and she disappeared down the sidewalk. The pair came up to the porch, and McCloud led them along the hall to where he'd left Cecil. Only George Cecil wasn't lying as McCloud had had seen him last. Somebody had rolled him over and his pockets had been turned out. They were quite empty.

McCloud hardly heard the awed, "Lieutenant, you sure wrapped him up for keeps!"

He didn't even bother to tell the mug that it hadn't been he who had done the wrapping. Somebody had searched Cecil right under McCloud's nose—at least in the short minute he'd been up front with Sherry. That could mean but one thing. Someone had been in the house all the time, and Sherry had known it and played him, Steve McCloud, for a sucker. Twice in one day. One side of his mouth lifted in a sneer at himself, and his eyes looked bitter, disillusioned.

He shivered suddenly, said, "Okay. You and Grogan bottle the place up. See that no one gets out."

"You mean there's more of 'em?"

"I don't know," he said heavily. "There might be. Anyway, I want to have a look around before we call Headquarters. On your way."

They split, and tramped to their posts, muttering.

McCloud went through the house pretty fast after that. Nine rooms, there were, most of them unfurnished. He found where George Cecil had lain, and this room showed signs of a hasty search too. There was a couch used as a makeshift bed, and on the table beside it was the file and a pair of handcuffs.

McCloud wiped them absently with his handkerchief in case the girl had left her prints, and suddenly woke up to what he was doing and cursed savagely. Still trying to cover her. What a fool! He put his mind on George Cecil's escape. Something very screwy about that. McCloud was positive that neither of the dicks on the train had had a chance to shoot. Yet undoubtedly Cecil had been shot. Add that to the search of the corpse just now and what did you have? *You had plenty.*

Lips tight, gray-green eyes very hard now, McCloud went to the wall phone and jiggled the hook. The operator answered instantly. This dump must have been one of Cecil's hole cards, held in readiness against just such an emergency as this. Headquarters answered and McCloud asked for Captain Kilgannon.

"Be right over," the skipper said. He was very pleased over the whole thing. "Nice going, boy."

McCloud said, "Yes, it was swell." He hung up and found Cecil's coat and vest, and whoever had searched the guy's pants had been here, too. The pockets were as empty as McCloud's stomach felt. Not that it was the dinner he'd missed. There was just sort of an aching hole in his middle that he didn't think would ever get filled up again.

While he was waiting, he buzzed the supervisor and asked if there had been any outgoing calls from this number between four and six. Cecil must have phoned Sherry, and if he had, then he had known where to find her. McCloud knew by this time that there wouldn't be any use looking for her at his flat. She'd slipped him again.

The supervisor's voice crackled in his ear and he noted something that he'd subconsciously tagged about the skipper's voice, too. It sounded like the diaphragm and magnets in the receiver weren't working right. They were working good enough for him to get an address out in Glendale, though. He thanked the woman and wrote the number down in his little book.

Captain Kilgannon came

clumping in on his short, thick legs, looked around the room and sniffed. Then he took McCloud's arm and led him out into the hall. There were a lot of guys clustered about George Cecil now. Several dicks, a couple of the boys from the lab, two reporters and Herman Schwartz. McCloud wondered how Herm had got in on this. Perhaps he had been hanging around Headquarters when the call came in, and having been Cecil's mouthpiece he'd naturally be curious.

Kilgannon said, "Let's see your gun, McCloud," and Steve hauled it out.

The skipper looked at it, and finally, very red in the face, yelled: "What goes on here, anyway? You never shot the guy, McCloud!"

"Did I say I did? I just told you he was dead."

"Sure, but—well, blow me down! Then who did it? Neither one of our boys got a chance to squeeze a trigger."

McCloud said, "Unh—hunh, that's what I thought, too. I've got an idea that the gun right down there on the floor is the one that plugged George Cecil. I think he took it away from the guy that plugged him. You find any more bodies around town this afternoon?"

Kilgannon snapped his fingers, remembering something. "We did pick up a guy! Over by the river in an ash can, and come to think of it he was one of Cecil's old mob. Now why didn't I think of that?"

"I guess we've all missed something about this crackpot train break. I don't believe George Cecil planned it, or knew a thing about it till it actually happened. But *somebody*"—he looked hard at Herman Schwartz—"wanted Cecil loose, and not because they liked him either."

"You mean he had something?"

"I mean he had something. Might have been evidence that'd keep his mob in line till he was sprung on parole. I don't think so, though. If French, or Schwartz here, had anything to fear from George Cecil, or if he had anything he wanted to spill, he'd have done it before now. I think it's dough, myself. I think he had plenty stashed away some place and somebody wanted it."

Schwartz' little shoe-button eyes glinted. It might have been amusement, though you couldn't tell in the half-gloom of the rear hall. "Believe it me, McCloud, George never had as much money left as you hint, and who should know it better than his—now—counsel?"

McCloud said, "Farmer French, maybe?" and Herm Schwartz chuckled and stratched at his nose.

"There you go, McCloud, always cracking jokes. You'll kill me one of these days."

Lieutenant Jake Kleinschmidt, coming in with a deputy M.C., overheard this last and vouchsafed a dire prophecy. "If he don't, somebody else will, Schwartz. I hope I'm there to see it."

Schwartz said, "You won't live that long, *kraut*."

Captain Kilgannon barked, "Cut it, you two. This is supposed to be a murder inquiry—remember?"

The doctor got up off his knees holding a slug in a pair of forceps. "Thirty-two," he said. "Maybe the same gun, for all I know . . . You'd better let me patch up that groove in your head, McCloud." He got some mercurochrome and adhesive out of his bag, and McCloud took off his hat and stood there twisting it in his big hands while he got taped up.

A couple of dicks came up leading one of the harness bulls. "This mug says there was a frail around, Skipper. McCloud told 'em to let her go."

Kilgannon got a sort of magenta color, and his short mustache stuck straight out. "So you let her go, huh? Who was she, McCloud?"

McCloud said, very steadily: "I wouldn't know, Skipper. Just a dame that happened along and heard the shots. I told her to beat it." He knew he wasn't fooling Kilgannon, though. The skipper was plenty smart.

Kilgannon said, side-stepping for a moment because he never liked to argue before subordinates, "Tell me what happened, boy. I mean, how come you smelled this place out?"

McCloud made up a good story. Everybody knows you've got a perfect right to protect your stoolies, so you don't have to tell which one it was or how you got the tip. "So I eased up to the porch," he finished, "just feeling the place out before I called a squad. The door was unlocked and so I came in, but George must have heard me because he let me have it before I could do more than get my gun out. The effort made him spring a leak, though, and he was dead when I got to him."

"And this girl came in after that?"

"That's right, Skipper," he said.

McCloud felt like a heel. Why was he lying like this? Just stubborn, he guessed, or maybe he was afraid of being razzed. Even as he thought that, he knew he was kidding himself. There was still a little hope at the back of his mind that Sherry would really be waiting at his flat. It wasn't much of a hope, but he had to be sure, didn't he? And all the time the little devils kept hammering at the ache in his head. "You're a sucker," they chuckled.

Captain Kilgannon looked baffled, but all he said was, "All

right, clean it up, you guys. Check that gun against the slugs you took out of Cecil. Maybe it's like McCloud says."

Steve edged toward the front door. Jake Kleinschmidt and Herman Schwartz came along behind him, still arguing, and the three of them went down to the street together. McCloud's car wasn't where he had left it. He felt a little better at that. Maybe Sherry would be waiting for him. Not that just waiting would square things, but still and all it might not be so bad.

Jake Kleinschmidt said, "Ah, nuts!" at some remark of Schwartz, and addressing McCloud: "You going my way, Steve?"

Steve said he was and they got in the department car and left the lawyer standing there looking after them with lively speculation in his bright little shoe-button eyes. It wasn't till they were well away from the district and almost down to Headquarters that McCloud asked Jake to drop him off.

"I want to run up to my flat for a minute, Jake. I feel like I was blood from head to foot."

Kleinschmidt pulled in beside a cab rank. "I've got to get back," he said. "With both the skipper and me off the desk you never know what'll happen, but you're always sure it'll be bad. This case is a long way from being broke, hunh, Steve? I mean, say your dope is okay, and that somebody's after something Cecil has stashed away. Even if Cecil killed the mug we found in the ash can, and the mug killed Cecil, there's still plenty angles. There was at least two gunnies mixed up in the break, maybe more, and we've got to get 'em all if we want the killing of a cop cleaned up right."

McCloud said, "That's the idea, Jake." He remembered something. "I guess I owe you a vote of thanks for talking me out of escorting George Cecil up to Quentin myself. It might have been me that was dead, hunh?"

Kleinschmidt nodded gloomingly. "I get premonitions sometimes," he admitted, and when he thought at the sight of Steve's grin that he was being ribbed, he growled: "All right, all right! But just the same it happened, didn't it?"

You couldn't argue with that. Only it seemed too bad that Jake's premonitions didn't include *all* the details. Steve said, "Well, I'll be seeing you," and caught a cab.

It was after nine when he got out in front of his flat. No sign of his car but he was still being hopeful. Sherry might have put it in the garage.

III

He went into the little foyer—it was only a four family build-

ing—and got his spare key from where he always hid it under a potted palm, and after that he took the carpeted stairs two at a time. He tried the door, found it locked. The lady on the opposite side of the landing opened her door and looked at him.

"Oh," she said, when she saw McCloud, and added: "I thought I heard you come in a little while ago." As if she were paid to keep an eye on his comings and goings. Snoopy old lady. She wore spectacles pushed up on her forehead and no doubt they'd have shattered had she known it was a girl she'd heard using his key.

McCloud said she must have been mistaken, and waited for her to close her door before he opened his. She withdrew, turtle-fashion, but still suspicious. She must have been reading the papers about the evil lives led by detectives. He went in quickly, shut the door behind him and stood very still on the threshold.

The lights were on and there was an almost imperceptible perfume that told him Sherry had been here. But Sherry wasn't here any more. She'd left a note. He strode to the table, picked up his key and the hurried scrawl under it.

Stephen, I can't wait. I feel as if I'm being watched every minute. Since George was convicted someone has been dogging my footsteps pretty consistently, not bothering me in the physical sense, but making me uncomfortable. The reporters were bad enough, but this—well, after what happened to George, it's rather frightening. Perhaps you hadn't better know where I'm going. Believe me, I know and appreciate what you did in letting me go, and it's only because I'm afraid your kindness will backfire that I'm getting out from under your feet. Your car is in the garage.

McCloud tore the note to bits, slowly, methodically, his square capable hands moving as if this were very important and had to be done just so. He tossed the pieces in the fireplace, and went out to the kitchen and poured himself a drink. He felt he deserved one now.

So Sherry had been tailed all the time her husband had been in the clink. Well, that tied in with McCloud's own theory that George Cecil had something somebody wanted. This certain somebody thought Sherry might know about it, too. Farmer French, the new Number One? Herman Schwartz, counsel for both Cecil and French? Now, there was a funny thing, Schwartz showing up with the cops like that. Funny, too, that Cecil had taken the rap without squawking if there was any bad

feeling between him and his lieutenants.

Still, Cecil wasn't a rat, and the killing McCloud had pinned on him was purely a personal matter. Therefore he wouldn't have any reason to squeal, and as long as he hadn't all during the trial, it didn't look as though anybody had any reason to worry about the future. So what did that leave? It left dough. Or information that could be turned into dough.

Somebody had sprung Cecil under the guise of doing him a favor, only they'd gotten careless and Cecil had figured it for a doublecross. He'd managed to get away, killing at least one rodman and getting the business himself. Still with the cuffs on too, poor devil.

So why hadn't he called Farmer French? Because he was as scared of French as he was of the cops. That left only Sherry. Yeah, she was the kind that'd help even a yellow dog if it was hurt, and George Cecil had been her husband. Naturally she'd gone.

McCloud washed up and got out a new topcoat. He was just shrugging bulky shoulders into it when someone rang the bell. Just to be on the safe side he got his gun out, held it down along his right leg and, twisting the knob with his left hand, stepped back as the door came open.

Captain Kilgannon said, "Oh, were you expecting somebody?" and looked at the gun.

McCloud put the gun away, feeling foolish. The skipper came in quietly enough, closed the door behind him in the same quiet fashion, but you could see trouble in his eyes. He stood squarely in front of McCloud, his short, thick legs spraddled out, his fat, hairy hands hanging straight down but curled a little at the tops. McCloud knew the signs. He'd seen those hands ball into fists many a time.

Kilgannon said, "You've been with me a long time, boy. Too long to start crossing me and the department now. Where is Sherry Cecil?"

McCloud looked blank. At least he hoped he was looking blank. "Sherry Cecil? Why, I wouldn't know, Skipper."

One of Kilgannon's hands lived up to its promise and made a fist. The fist came up with unbelievable swiftness and cracked McCloud square in the mouth. He fell back, putting up his own hands instinctively, but used them only to ward off the skipper's follow-up. He was a head taller than Kilgannon and could probably have taken him apart because the Old Man had a lot of years on his shoulders. But hell, the skipper was—well, the skipper.

Kilgannon saw he wasn't going to fight back and cursed

him. "You're the first Irishman I ever saw that wouldn't take a chance. I guess that's all you could expect of a rat, though, even an Irish rat. Look, McCloud. I came here before going some place else, just to give you a chance. Do you come clean, or do I take your badge off you and go out and get the girl myself?"

McCloud's eyes got a dangerous light in them but his voice was quiet, even a little resigned. He'd always known the skipper was smart. If he said he could find the girl, he probably knew what he was talking about. Anyway it was no time to argue.

"All right, Skipper, I'm a heel as far as you and the department are concerned. I tried to cover Sherry because—well, because I figured she'd had trouble enough."

"And because you're nuts about her!"

"Okay! I'm nuts about her. I knew you smelled something, but how did you find out for sure?"

Kilgannon laughed shortly. "Figured the Old Man for a sap, hunh? Figured I swallowed your lies hook, line and sinker. Why, you poor dimwit. I even know how much you paid for the file!"

McCloud's lips moved but no sound came out. Was this guy smart or was he smart? Curiosity got the better of his judgment finally, and he said, "How'd you know about that?"

Kilgannon snarled: "The price tag, screwball! I found it on the floor. Talk about dumb—Hell's bells, McCloud, you might have at least got rid of the price tag!"

McCloud thought, "Well, this is it. He's got me deadern' a mackeral. The way it would look to anybody in their right mind I helped the girl buy the file, and naturally I'd know what it was for. Maybe I'm even supposed to have cut the cuffs off him myself."

Aloud he said, "The tag had Kent and Nichols printed all over it, of course. You got hold of the clerk and he remembered me as if I was his own brother. Look, Skipper, would you believe it if I told you I had no idea? That I didn't even know George Cecil was on the loose when I paid for that lousy chunk of iron? Why should I buy a file when I had a key?"

Kilgannon said, "Sure, I thought of that. Maybe that's one of the reasons I'm giving you a break. You say you didn't know. You found out later, didn't you—and you let the girl walk out right under the cops' noses. Fact is, you even tell 'em she's okay. She's an accessory, and so are you, and if you don't turn her up I'm going to throw you in the can and go out and get her myself. You think I don't know where she is? Why, I've forgotten more tricks than you'll ever know. A phone supervisor gave

me the address in Glendale. Surprised?"

It was a surprise, too. McCloud was so surprised that, almost unconsciously, he brought one up from below his knees and hung it on the skipper's chin. Kilgannon was braced so that he hardly moved out of his tracks. He just sighed a little and sort of melted down to the floor and lay there looking quite peaceful, though a trifle astonished.

McCloud stared down at him gloomily. After a while he mumbled something that sounded like, "Now that's just swell. The end of a perfectly delightful evening. Not to mention a career." He put on his hat, being very careful to get it at just the right angle, and went out, closing the door softly behind him.

The lady across the hall popped out, like a cuckoo bird. "Did I hear something drop?"

"I think so," McCloud said. "If you listen real close you'll hear something else in a few minutes. Don't let it bother you, though. It'll just be a guy named Kilgannon pretending he's a steam roller."

He went down the stairs and around to the garage at the rear. It was dark in the alley, darker than that in the garage itself, but Sherry had left the dors open. Steve went in on the left side of the car, reached to turn the dashlight on and somebody shoved a gun in his right kidney. There was something about the way it was done that told you it was a gun and not a banana, and what the gun's owner said proved he'd had a lot of experience at that sort of thing.

"Let's play nice," he said, "shall we, copper?" His voice was gentle, almost caressing. "I'm awful glad you didn't bring your pal down with you, because I'm all alone. Guess I'll be enough, though, hunh?"

McCloud had one hand on the light switch, the other frozen to the door handle. He could have maybe kicked the guy in the shin or something. But he had an idea that it might be his last kick, so he just kept on leaning inside the car and said he liked to play nice.

"Well, now, that's just fine," said the guy genially. "What I always say is a copper's got just as much sense as a human being. Or almost, anyway. If you stand up now, I won't have to reach so far."

McCloud straightened, and the gun went away from his kidney and smacked him on the skull instead. It was very neat. This guy had so much experience that he could call his shots to a sixteenth of a second.

When McCloud opened his eyes he was still half in the car and just starting to slide. But the guy had gone clear around, gotten in and was closing the right hand door. He hooked the gun under McCloud's chin—not

hard, just enough to snap him wide awake.

"Time to get up baby," he said. "We got a long drive ahead of us."

McCloud grabbed for the gun, seeing it was so close, and the guy was faster than he was. He didn't grab anything but thin air, and the guy's left fist collided with his nose. Right on the spot that starts you crying. And then the guy's left hand snaked the gun out of McCloud's shoulder clip, and he sighed. "My, my, I heard you were a tough guy to get along with."

McCloud was so mad he couldn't speak. His throat felt full of blood and his lungs were bursting, and his back teeth ached, he was clenching them so hard. But he wasn't silly. He climbed in under the wheel when the guy said, "Climb," and after a little they were out of the alley and rolling across town.

The guy seemed to think he'd said enough for a while because he didn't waste words saying right or left. He kept one gun in McCloud's ribs and used the other to gesture with. McCloud counted up to one hundred, very slowly, and his blood pressure went down accordingly. Out of the corner of his eye he kept studying the guy's profile, trying to place it. He decided this was one of the two gunmen who had been in the skipper's office with Farmer French.

He said, spacing his words carefully: "What have I got that Farmer wants?"

"Don't ask me, copper. I was just told to grab you. You and the frail. My pal had to leave when the dame did, and I was kinda worried when Kilgannon showed. What'd you do with him?"

"He's right behind us," McCloud said. It didn't work, though. The guy just chuckled pleasantly and refused to turn around to look. It was discouraging. Especially after what he'd just said about his pal going after Sherry. If Farmer French didn't get her the cops would, and all in all it looked like a stormy night.

French would hardly send a gangster that could be identified with him if he was going to turn McCloud loose afterward. So figuring that way, McCloud didn't have a lot to lose by taking a chance now.

IV

They were coming down the Los Feliz hill into Glendale, with Riverside Drive and a red flasher at the bottom. You're supposed to stop here so it was perfectly natural for Steve to ease down on the brake pedal. From the hood's angle there was no danger because there wasn't a traffic cop within miles. Besides, he had two guns. The thing the hood

didn't know was that McCloud's car had mechanical brakes and the weren't synchronized very well. It wasn't raining any more but the streets were still plenty wet.

There was a little cross-traffic on Riverside, and McCloud said worriedly, "You think we'd better stop?"

The hood looked and McCloud slammed the pedal down hard. Two of the brakes locked. The car tried to do a sudden stop, botched it and staggered into a good imitation of a barrel roll.

The hood cracked his head into the windshield. His gun went off three times but it wasn't in McCloud's ribs any more on account of he had the guy's wrist and was really going to town. Just as the car turned over he got this gun loose, and the hood remembered he had a second gun and turned it on McCloud. The two piled up on the right side of the coupe, the down side, and the car slid along crazily till it smashed into a light pole.

McCloud went out for a minute. When he opened his eyes glass was still raining down on him. The light pole was bent in the middle, like a stooped old man, and trying to peer in through the upper side of the car. McCloud pushed himself off the guy underneath, saw that the guy didn't have a head any more. The door must have come open when the car tilted over, and the guy's head had got itself caught between the door and the frame, and the car had dropped smack on his neck. The guillotine never did a cleaner job.

Outside, brakes were screeching, and somebody was yelling: "Good God, what a wreck! What a wreck!"

McCloud wormed his bulk around till he could get hold of the door handle. It wouldn't work so he knocked the rest of the glass out of the window with his gun and started to crawl out. The guy outside that was telling the world what a wreck it was changed his yelp to "He's alone! Hot ziggety, bring 'em back alive!" He had a bottle.

McCloud took it away from him, said, "Shut up," and looked around. Five or six cars; more coming up. There was a coupé that was pointed in the right direction and only one guy in it. Still carrying the bottle, McCloud brushed its indignant owner aside and went over to the coupé. He showed his badge and the guy opened the door for him.

"Central and Los Feliz," Steve said. "I've got to get to a phone." He nursed a little of the liquor from the bottle.

"Anybody else in that car?"

McCloud told him there was but it didn't matter on account of the guy was very dead indeed. "Quite a polite guy, too," he said, and opening the door at the corner of Central he got out.

and thanked the man. He gave him the bottle, too, and then he ran on legs that were a little wobbly and sort of exploded into the corner drug store. He dropped a coin in the phone and watched his finger dialing the number the supervisor had given him. The finger was bloody and so was the rest of his hand, but it wasn't his blood. He shivered a little.

Sherry's voice came to him, sort of strained: "Yes?"

"McCloud. Are you okay, Sherry?"

There was a brief wait before she said, "Yes, quite all right, thank you." And then, very desperately: "No. I'm not. Stephen. Oh, Stephen, come quickly. I'm at—" The line went dead.

McCloud was out of the store, out in the middle of the street and flagging a cab before his dime hit the bottom of the coin box. The driver didn't want to argue. Not with the gun, nor with the look on Steve's face. They went away from there in a hurry.

Cypress was a dead-end street, curving gently on itself till it ran smack into the cliffs below the glistening white monument that marked Forest Lawn Cemetery. The hundred-foot shaft glowed softly under the caress of indirect lighting, but the street itself was dark, shrouded in the dripping shadow of giant pepper trees and the heavy, sweetish smell of orange blossoms. The little bungalow sat far back in a tangle of shrubs. There was a light behind drawn shades.

McCloud gave the driver a crisp, "Wait," and ran up the drive toward the light.

From the shadows a deeper shadow detached itself and somebody said, "McCloud!" in a surprised hiss.

Steve put on the brakes long enough to recognize Jake Kleinschmidt. Just then Sherry screamed inside. Not bothering to stop and wonder why the Lieutenant should be here, McCloud ran on and up the steps. The door opened under his hand.

A guy came out of another door down the hall, saw McCloud and the gun in his hand jumped as he squeezed the trigger. He squeezed it twice, and the first slug creased McCloud between arm and ribs. The second smacked into the ceiling on account of the guy was already falling when he fired it.

Steve's first try had been a bull's-eye. It looked like the guy had tried to catch the slug in his teeth, only he hadn't been fast enough and it had got by his teeth, making a wreck out of the back of his neck. He was dead by the time he hit the floor. It was the pal of the guy who'd lost his head; the second of the two who had been with Farmer French.

McCloud hurdled the body,

plunged through the side door expecting anything, but all he found was Sherry Cecil. She was in a big chair before the fireplace, eyes closed and a little trickle of blood running down her cheek from a cut on her forehead. Wrists and ankles were taped cruelly tight with adhesive but Sherry wasn't feeling anything. She was out cold.

McCloud went to his knees beside her, mumbling, "You poor kid—you poor kid!" It was very difficult getting the tape off because the whole damned room and everything in it was all smoked up with a red haze. McCloud didn't know that the haze was mental, born of his own insensate rage. Even Lieutenant Jake Kleinschmidt's fat face was tinted with it, there in the doorway, and the gun in his fist was but an added aggravation.

It came to Steve quite suddenly what he must do. Kleinschmidt was behind the whole thing; at least a part of it. Sure, it had been Jake who had tipped French about the train. Jake had sent the rodmen to Steve's flat, because he was the only one who had known definitely that Steve was going there. Steve had told him and no one else. And Kleinschmidt was here, wasn't he? How could he have known about this place if he wasn't in with French's mob? The skipper wouldn't have told him.

McCloud was unconscious of putting his own gun away, reckless of the menace of that other gun in Kleinschimdt's fist. Big square hands outstretched, he rounded the chair very carefully, because he was afraid Jake's face might disappear if he took his eyes off it. Then he had Jake's throat and was clamping down hard, and Jake's beating at his head with the gun and yelling didn't seem to make a bit of difference.

The two of them fell down finally, McCloud on top. The gun went off and Steve felt a jolt of pain in his side. He released the throat long enough to take the gun away and toss it aside. One of Jake's big fists came up and clipped him on the button, rocking him, but he went back to the dogged business of tearing that head off its shoulders.

Jake's voice, far away, croaked, hoarsely: "McCloud, are you crazy? Steve, have you gone off your nut?"

McCloud grunted, "Yeah, like a fox." He punctuated each syllable with a squeeze.

Then Sherry's voice, very gentle and soothing: "Stephen, please don't. Don't do this thing, Stephen. I'm all right."

He looked down at the purpling face above his hands as if seeing it for the first time. Then, because Jake would keep, and Sherry needed him, he rolled groggily to his feet and stood there swaying. Breath whistled

between his teeth, and he made sympathetic little chuckling sounds, taking the adhesive off her wrists.

Sherry touched his head gently. "Oh, Stephen, what have I done to you? You've been wounded again."

"Wounded?" he said vaguely. He put his hand to his side and felt warm blood seep out through his fingers. "Sure, sure, but nothing to write home about. Just a scratch." He looked at her, then, keenly. "Look, Sherry, I'm all washed up, so you don't have to pretend any more. George left a lot of dough some place, and French wants it. All right, I'll help you get it. Where is it?"

She looked at him as if he had struck her. "You really believe that! You think I helped him for money."

"What's the use arguing, Sherry? You know where the dough is, don't you?"

"No, I don't! George was very secretive, and even if he hadn't been, I lost all interest in his money when I found out how he made it. All I got out of marriage, all I wanted, was this little place where I could hide."

"All right, I believe you, but nobody else will. There's a rap out against us for harboring an escaped criminal. Let's you and me find a spot where we can both hide. They tell me South America isn't so bad—if you like it."

Jake Kleinschmidt said, "You are not going to South America, McCloud. You and the dame ain't going *any* place—except to hell, maybe. We're gonna wait for French and that rat mouthpiece of his, and I'm gonna blow the innards outa every damn' one of you."

Jake had his gun again and was holding it very steadily. There was kind of a glary look in his eyes, as if he were high, or really off his nut. After what he'd just said, it was a toss-up.

McCloud took a deep breath. "Sure, Jake, you want to kiss us all. Well that's all right with me. Only how are you going to find the money without me? French don't know where it is. Herman Schwartz don't know. Otherwise they wouldn't be still trying to find out. Sherry don't know, either. In fact, I'm the only one that does know, so let's be crooked cops together, hunh?"

Jake laughed a little. Not with his eyes, though. "I always figured you for a square copper, McCloud. Until tonight. Just goes to show what a sap a guy can be, hunh? Either you're in with French, or you and the little lady are playing the hand alone. But whatever your angle is, you crossed the department and I don't want any part of you."

Slug-nutty, that's what the guy was. McCloud, watching the gun all the time said, "That sounds kind of funny coming

from you, Jake. The fact that you're here ties you into the deal with French. The skipper never told you about this place because he was trying to give me a break first. And somebody on the inside slipped French the dope on what train Cecil was riding. I'll give you this, though: You saved my life by talking me out of that trip. Or were you afraid French's rodmen couldn't take me like they did Fogel?"

The glary look went out of Kleinschmidt's eyes for a second, but it came right back again. "All right, if you're so smart, where do you think I can find the dough?"

McCloud, sparring for time, or a break, said, "Cecil must have had the dope on him. Not the money, but the means of getting it, maybe. If it was as much as I think, he couldn't carry the dough around with him. It wasn't at the house, or you guys would have found it. My idea is that there's a key, or a receipt, or something that'll show where the stuff is."

"There wasn't any key, or any receipt."

"You guys just don't know where to look, Jake. Did you ever think of looking inside the telephone receiver?" He was just guessing, but it might be a good guess at that. The skipper's voice, and the supervisor's, had sounded kind of funny. He wished Sherry would cough, or something, to distract this guy for a second. She didn't, just sat there wide-eyed, and he began to bunch his muscles for a try in spite of the gun. Someone moved in the hall and, looking over Kleinschmidt's shoulder, he saw that it was the taxi driver. The mug had a monkey wrench in his fist and it looked about two feet long.

He inched inside the door, winked at McCloud, who looked carefully away so that Jake wouldn't notice. There was a sudden dull thump. Sherry caught her breath in a little gasp, held it. McCloud looked. Jake Kleinschmidt was down on his knees, just beginning to topple over on his face, and the gun in his hand made another dull thump when it hit the floor.

V

The taxi driver looked a little white around the gills. "Every time," he said, "every time I hafta do that I always get sick afterwards."

McCloud said, "If you get sick I'll hold your head, bud. I owe you plenty for that."

He got down on his knees and examined Jake. Not even a crack in the skull. The guy must be made of reinforced concrete. Even as he thought this, his vision blurred and a lump crawled up in his throat because Jake had always been a swell egg, and

even a cop sometimes needed extra dough.

He stood up. "Well, I guess we'd better scram."

She looked at him; looked at him as if they were quite alone and the taxi bandit wasn't standing there with his mouth open and drinking it all in. "I'm sorry, Stephen. I've been a worry to you for a long time, haven't I?"

He shrugged. His light hair was all mussed up and there was a bitter droop to his lips, but the gray-green eyes smiled down at her. "You're an awful nuisance," he agreed.

He took all the money out of his pockets, around forty dollars, and gave it to the guy with the monkey wrench. "Take us back to Los, fella, and then forget you ever saw us. Can do?"

The guy said he had a terrible memory. They started down the hall and the driver stumbled over the rodmen on the floor. "I done that before," he complained pettishly. "Comin' in. The guy must be dead."

McCloud said, "I think so too," and got between the dead guy and Sherry so she wouldn't have to look at all the details. He was so busy doing this that it was Sherry who saw the skipper first.

Kilgannon was blocking the front door. He said, "Stand still, you," and the gun in his hand made it unanimous. They stood still. The driver hefted his monkey wrench suggestively, and looked at McCloud who shook his head. Kilgannon didn't miss a thing. He took one step forward, slapped the driver with the flat of his gun.

"Like that, hunh? Where do *you* fit in all this?"

The taxi driver said he didn't. He said it was all just a mistake, on account of he was only trying to protect a fare, and what with all the shooting going on, and dead guys tripping you, and this and that, it was all very disconcerting.

Kilgannon barked, "Dead guys, hunh? Seems like they follow you around, don't it, McCloud? First George Cecil. Then we pick up your car and there's a guy in it without a head, and here's another guy that if he ain't dead I never hope to see a stiff. A regular little private war, hunh?"

McCloud said it wasn't very private. He didn't feel like kidding. It was just a thought. Kilgannon said it was too damned private for an honest cop to be mixed up in. "That lets you out, though. You're crooked."

Sherry said, "He is not!"

The skipper said, "Oh, yeah? Well, your recommendation just makes it that much tougher on McCloud." He looked at the driver's badge number. "All right, you. I can find *you* whenever I want. Scram out of here and phone the Glendale cops."

The driver went out, shaking his head.

Kilgannon gestured with his gun. "Let's see what's inside."

They looked, and Jake Kleinschmidt wasn't there any more. Far down the street was the roar of a motor, and the open window told McCloud how Jake had got out. He felt relieved at that, more than anything else, because it would be tough on the Old Man to find out his whole staff was crossing him. And then he got a very funny idea indeed.

"Skipper," he said, "I think I can lead you to Farmer French on a tie-up that won't be pleasant for you, maybe. But it will definitely dunk the Farmer. He's in this up to his neck. You know it and I know it. But proving it is something else again. Even identifying the two gangsters won't help because they're dead. Herman Schwartz could spring Farmer on a writ so fast it'd make your head swim."

The skipper twirled the cylinder of his gun. He didn't look as if he wanted to shoot anybody. But McCloud knew he was seething inside. Kilgannon was a fanatic about anything affecting the department's reputation. His florid cheeks were taut.

"Not pleasant for me, hunh? I've had to take plenty in my time, including this caper of yours, McCloud. I'll bust this town wide open if I have to. So what?"

"We'll have to go back to the house on First Street, Chief. And we'll have to hurry. I've a hunch that French will be there, too. There's something there he wants."

Kilgannon's eyes flickered from McCloud to Sherry. Steve couldn't tell what he was thinking. Then, swifter than light, the skipper's left hand darted out, patted McCloud's empty holster, his pockets. "All right," he said, "I'll give it a whirl. You'll do the driving."

They went out and got in the skipper's car, McCloud under the wheel, Kilgannon and Sherry in the tonneau. Kilgannon kept his gun in his lap all the way back to town. There were two cars parked in the same block at the First Street house, not in front of it but farther down, and McCloud didn't know whether that meant anything or not.

He rounded the block to the alley and they all got out. It was pretty dark in the back yard. Kilgannon kept nudging McCloud with the gun, and holding onto Sherry's arm, and the three of them went stumbling over old tin cans and one thing another till McCloud lost his temper.

"For crying out loud, Skipper, this is supposed to be a plant, not a bunch of visiting firemen! I'm not going to run away."

Kilgannon rasped back, "You are trying to tell me!"

He kept the gun right where

it was, and it was lucky he had it out, at that, because, just then a guy opened the back door and looked out. Faint yellow light identified him as Herman Schwartz. Herman had a gun. He saw McCloud first and lifted the gun in both hands, as if it were very heavy, and the gun went *boom-boom-boom.* But Schwartz must have closed his eyes, woman-like because none of the slugs hit McCloud.

The skipper's thirty-eight barked, just once, and Herman Schwartz sat down, looking surprised. Then McCloud was on him, wrenching the gun free. From the room to the left came the sound of more shots, a whole flock of them, very loud and very close togther. McCloud ran in there. Farmer French was against the wall, blood spurting from his face, his throat, his chest, yet holding himself almost upright by holding to the dangling telephone cord with one hand.

He was trying to lift his gun for another shot at Jake Kleinschmidt, half in, half out of the window. It was too heavy apparently. He let it drop, and then the telephone cord snapped and he dropped too. Kilgannon came in, still holding onto Sherry, and dragging Herman Schwartz.

He let go of both when he saw McCloud lifting Jake through the window. Jake was hit. McCloud couldn't tell how bad, but he wasn't dead. He wasn't even out, because when Steve stretched him out on the floor he still held on to his gun, and opened his eyes and looked up at the skipper. McCloud stepped back.

Sherry, over by the door, gave a little startled scream and McCloud turned and saw Schwartz come to life. Herm had another gun, or maybe it was the Farmer's. He was pointing this at the skipper's back and muttering gibberish. McCloud yelled, which was all he could do as he saw Kilgannon dive out of line. Then the gun in Jake Kleinschmidt's fist started belching. It kept right on till there was nothing but empty clicks, and Herman Schwartz was nothing but an empty, lifeless shell.

Jake lay back in McCloud's arms. "Worth it," he smiled. "Worth every damn' one of my mistakes just to burn them down when they couldn't wriggle out of it."

McCloud said huskily, "Sure, boy, we all make mistakes. I'm for you, Jake."

Kilgannon came over and got down on his knees, too. "This isn't private, is it?" He got out his knife and slit Jake's vest and shirt open and away from the gaping wound. "What you laying down for, Jake? You're not gonna die!"

Jake said, "That's—that's too bad, Skipper. I kind of hoped

I would, on account of—well, on account of I'm a crooked cop and I know how you hate crooked cops."

McCloud said, "Nuts, Jake! I've been thinking about some of the things you said out there in Glendale and I guess—I guess I kind of misjudged your motives. For a time, when I had you pegged for crooked, I thought all your raving about how you hated the rackets was just an act. But it was on the level."

Jake pushed himself into a sitting position against the wall. "Why wouldn't I hate 'em? Look what they done to my own brother, let alone a lot of other guys. Did the law do anything about it? Not a thing. So I thought I'd play smart. I started doing French a favor now and then, hoping to pin something on him from the inside. He hooked *me* instead. I *had* to play to keep from being busted out of the department. But all the time I kept hoping I'd some day get him and Schwartz in a spot where I could burn them down legally."

He smiled crookedly at the skipper. "Funny, hunh? I guess I must have gone a bit screwy, thinking about things. I mean, being a cop, even a kind of crooked one, it never occurred to me to just go out and shoot these guys. I had to get 'em in a place they had no business to be, so I could smoke 'em and have a good legal excuse."

"Kind of a private war?" the skipper said.

"Kind of," Jake said, and closed his eyes.

Kilgannon looked at McCloud and Steve said, "I figured him all wrong, Skipper. Plenty wrong. All but one thing. He really did phone the tip I gave him to where it would do the most good. Only thing was, I didn't figure the right motive for his doing it. If you'll bother to look, you'll see that both Jake and I were right."

McCloud pointed to Farmer French with the telephone receiver still clutched in his dead hand. The hard rubber shell had shattered at the bell and there was a flat key and a piece of paper on the floor beside it. The skipper got up, unfolded the paper. It was a storage company receipt for a private room.

Jake opened his eyes again. "You got me wrong, McCloud, about how I knew of the Glendale place. I guessed, of course, that you were holding out about the girl. So when you told me you were going home, I beat it out there, got there before you did, I guess. Anyway, I was just in time to see the little lady come out and grab a cab. There was a guy tailing her, and I sort of tagged along behind both of them.

"You see, she didn't mean

anything to me, except maybe a chance to get French. I waited out there in the yard expecting maybe the Farmer would come, and then I could nail him on a kidnap rap, or something. But I never had any part of killing that cop. Farmer promised me there'd be nobody hurt, and I was still hoping for a break. See what I mean?"

McCloud said he did. "The skipper does, too, Jake, no matter how fierce he looks."

Kilgannon got out a handkerchief and blew his nose loudly. He avoided McCloud's eyes and said, "Well, we can't sit here gabbing all night. The cops'll be here any minute, and we gotta get Jake to the hospital. There's a lot of screwy angles to this, though. Why'd French and his mob stall so long? I gotta *know* things so I can make out a good report."

McCloud said, "It's all pretty clear, now that we've got Jake's side of it. French's gangsters must have lost Cecil after he gunned the one you found in the ashcan. Anyway, he got in the clear and came here. They knew he was in the district somewhere, but didn't know the exact place. My guess is that they just patroled the district till something happened. When they heard him shooting at me, they came an—" He broke off, flushing a little as he remembered how they'd searched the corpse while he was standing at the front door waving goodbye to Sherry.

"Well, they came here and what? I really would like to know."

Steve told him. He knew he was a sap and there was no use pretending.

Then the cops came, and the skipper forgot McCloud for a minute in his irritation at the way a big bull picked up Jake Kleinschmidt. "The guy's going to the hospital, not the morgue, dummy! Be careful!"

The bull said, "'Scuse it, please, Skipper," and went out, carrying Jake like a sack of potatoes.

Kilgannon bellowed. "I dunno which is worse, private wars or flat-feet." He went to the phone, found he couldn't use it because Farmer French had practically ruined it. He spun about, glared at McCloud who had his arm around Sherry's waist and was leading her out the door.

"Hey, you, whose private war was this, anyway? Yours or Jake's?"

"Does it make any difference?" McCloud said. "It worked."

what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

A discerning look at mystery fiction in hard covers . . . by a critic whose major yardstick is that of literary excellence.

YOU AGREE that a mystery novel *can* be relaxing?

Yes—unless you desperately need the artificial stimulation of both glands and imagination, heaved at you a shade less than subtly by the gentlemen of the Spillane School, gentlemen who subscribe to the theory that a majority of us are potential perverts or sadists or great lovers or all three. The grunt and groan school, with considerable and sometimes clinical attention paid to the bedroom, admittedly has a role in our times. Any tabloid will establish this. But I have always contended and will continue to argue that this is not *the* American reader. Publisher and addict alike should remember that there is a literate half of the Nation. It is to this latter half that I speak.

THE MAN WITH TWO WIVES by Patrick Quentin (Simon and Schuster, $2.75), is the portrait of the presumably charming son-in-law of a publishing empire who had been married to a very beautiful woman and *is* married

Talk to a mystery story reader and the chances are three to one he'll mention some recent book he'd like to secure an informative report on. So with this issue we're launching a brand new department devoted to a close expert's appraisal of detective fiction in hard covers. And what more inspiring guest could we have than Hans Stefan Santesson, discoverer of many brilliant new talents, when he was the famed editor of the Universal Mystery Book Club.

to a rather complicated woman. It had been years since that remote, rhapsodic, dangerous and doomed period in Europe when Bill Harding had been married to the beautiful Angelica Roberts. The days of the great American novel were gone; the day when anything—even an alibi for a possible murderer—could be arranged, had replaced the dreams and the hopes that had been a part of him not so long ago. Harding's discovery of the rather complicated private lives that circled around him, and his final rebellion, ends with murder and the identity of a murderer making him think, once more, about the woman who had never given a damn about her public personality. Mr. Harding is possibly a charming man—when murder does not upset the routine of his life—but he is a very human and credible personality. I think a number of you will like Quentin's new book. Recommended.

Helen Reilly introduces us, in COMPARTMENT K (Random House, $2.75), to a number of people who had both reason and opportunity to murder. Did that include Nils Gantry, the writer to whom Rose O'Hara was engaged? Did it include, possibly, Daniel Font's mother-in-law, Loretta Pilgrim? Did it include lean, stockily-built Colonel Robert Hugh Eden, who had known one of the victims for years and hadn't liked him? Helen Reilly's story of Murder's pilgrimage from the streets of New York to Elizabeth Questing's palatial mountain estate in the Canadian Rockies will win new friends for the past president of the Mystery Writers of America.

INNOCENT BYSTANDER by Barbara Frost (Coward-McCann, $2.75) reports on the third time that lawyer Marka de Lancey finds herself involved in suddenly very personal murder. The blurb suggests that Marka "couldn't turn back . . . any more than the reader, caught in the chilling suspense of this fast-paced mystery novel." This is nonsense! There is nothing chilling about the suspense as Marka de Lancey walks the streets wondering who wants to murder her. There is an *alive* quality to Barbara Frost's present writing that distinguishes her from the papier-mache and cliche-spattered school. Marka is credible flesh and blood. The very human—and very jealous—Assistant District Attorney Tim Gerrity is equally credible. Even Marka's exciting client, though a possible murderer, is a thoroughly believable character. The gentlemen, young and old alike, who swear by and not at the sex-cum-sadism school, will find this uncongenial stuff. Perhaps it is the wrong yard-

stick, but it is relaxing to run into fairly normal and believable people, without sinister mutterings in the background; people who fall in love—and who murder—the way people do around the corner from you. *Is* the suspense "chilling?" No! *Do* I recommend Barbara Frost's INNOCENT BYSTANDER? Yes!

Michael Shayne was a complete stranger in Brockton. That has not been known to interfere with the red-headed detective's talent for running into violence and murder and beautiful women, and Brockton is no exception. Brett Halliday's STRANGER IN TOWN (Torquil, $2.75), is the 27th report on Michael Shayne's dramatic and often imitated career. The indestructible Shayne, who is so very much a part of the folklore of our times, runs afoul of the viciously corrupt police force of Brockton and assorted other gentry, in Halliday's latest hard-hitting novel. Recommended.

GENTLY DOES IT by Alan Hunter (Rinehart, $2.75), has the smoothness of the conventional English report on the C. I. D. in action without the distinction of Marric's excellent *Gideon's Day* (Harper's, $2.75). Both novels are built around the personality of one of the men who stand for New Scotland Yard—and there the similarity ends. Chief Inspector Gently of the C.I.D., on the wrong side of fifty, with his slow mandarin nod, his comfortable smile and his ability to listen and to wait, is a persuasive and very British Inspector Maigret as he traps a murderer who had made one mistake too many.

DORIS MILES DISNEY, portraitist of the weaknesses and the strength of our middle-class, turns her attention on the Mike who wanted to divorce Edna but knew that divorce could not be granted to a man on the grounds that his wife was a frump. The murder of Edna is no solution as Jefferson DiMarco, claims adjuster for the company that had insured her, probes into the background of the men and the women surrounding the slightly less than bereaved husband. TRICK OR TREAT (Doubleday, $2.75), is good Disney, as Jeff DiMarco does what it was his job to do. It would be a long time, however, before the people who had died so violently "and the people whose lives would never be the same again because of them" grew dim in his memory. His eyes were somber as he left Holcomb. Death had been very close to Jeff DiMarco . . . Recommended.

Otto John's defection inspires M. E. Chaber's interesting THE

SPLINTERED MAN (Rinehart, $2.75), the best to date of Chaber's series reporting on insurance investigator March's adventures. March, working out of Denver, a shade thicker in the middle and much too conscious of passing the mid-thirties, is suddenly recalled to active duty and assigned to work with the Central Intelligence Agency. Hermann Gruss had defected to East Berlin under interesting, and suspicious circumstances. Milo March's task is to bring him out. His adventures in East Berlin as he comes closer and closer to his objective, and the frightening hours he spends in the hospital where Dr. Oderbruch is experimenting with drug-induced schizophrenia end on a startling note. Even Goethe enthusiasts will agree with the blurb that "suspense, adventure and excitement are his lot" as March, behind the Iron Curtain, comes constantly closer to—death! Read THE SPLINTERED MAN (I never quite "dig" some titles.) Recommended!

And if you haven't already read David Alexander's SHOOT A SITTING DUCK (Random House, $2.75), do something about it tonight, even if you have to buy the book. The publisher and the author won't object! The best Bart Hardin story to date. Bart Hardin is the managing editor of the *Broadway Times* who from time to time runs into characters with violent ideas. SHOOT A SITTING DUCK kept me up, the other night, to the last page. Christmas becomes an uncomfortable time for Bart as his publisher gets strange ideas about him. A man is murdered in the building where he lives, and another man is murdered minutes after Hardin has left him, and his friend Romano, Homicide, ruins the brand new coat he's just gotten for Christmas. Yes—recommended!

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